# IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN YOU

COLIN KNOX

*Frontispiece*

# IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN YOU

★

COLLIE KNOX

*With Fifteen Plates*

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THIS, MY FIRST BOOK,
I DEDICATE WITH
RESPECT AND GRATITUDE
TO
ARTHUR LESLIE CRANFIELD
WHO, ON JULY 28TH, 1933,
"TOOK A CHANCE."

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# IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN YOU

## CHAPTER ONE

I FEAR that this is all going to be exceedingly difficult.

I have in the last few years written a frighteningly large number of words about other people, and have not found the task too noticeably irksome.

But when I am forced to contemplate the fact that in the next hundred or so pages I shall be compelled to write a great deal about myself words begin to fail me. And words are rather particularly necessary to the completion, or even to the beginning, of any book, even if it only be a book about the doings and misdoings of so frequently bewildered a mortal as myself.

I do not, I think, suffer from false modesty. My modesty is far from false ; it is tantalisingly real. I take no credit for this. For it has maybe been something of a curse in my present profession of journalism, in which modesty is not a virtue that is often rewarded by the name on a placard. I only began to succeed, in the eyes of the world, in my second profession . . . for the Army was heartily my first, when I more or less overcame an inferiority complex which none of my friends or

dearest enemies were able to understand. For myself, even I failed betimes to understand it.

Any human being who happens to be reading my words and who suffers, or has suffered, from an inferiority complex of small or large proportions will know that here lies the hell where youth and laughter go. I beseech them—in so far as the world can gauge—to get rid of it immediately, if they wish to get on in the business of making headway in this increasingly astonishing world.

I have always been shy . . . though again no one ever believes me when I tell them so. I have always worked . . . till a few years ago . . . with one eye on my unworthiness for whatever salary I have been paid and the other eye on the possible dismissal. Worry and fear have walked with me many days of my life. Maybe it is because of these things that I am able in some measure to get rather nearer than the next man to my fellow struggler, and can understand so well how prevalent are these fears in so many lives and how easily they can be scattered to the four winds. If one only knows the way. And mercifully I am now "in the know." More or less.

Knowing the way about anything in life is invariably . . . if I mistake not . . . just another manner of spelling experience.

We live in an age when psychologists thrive and prosper like green bay trees. Many of them live by Freud alone. Nothing is beyond them. When we announce our fears of travelling by Underground the listening psychologist sits up.

He tells us that this fear is due to some vastly embarrassing, and usually faintly disgusting, experience of our early life.

His reasoning is often at fault . . . and his conclusions are sometimes as dangerous as they are obscene, but there is little doubt that the path of our childhood, be it stormy or rose strewn, leads to a tangled crossroads when we come to the age of indiscretion.

William Wordsworth once said that the child is father to the man. Well satisfied with his mot he said many other things—but nothing more worth the saying. For it holds a truth as eternal as the stars or a modern film personage's passion for publicity.

Which brings me, rather inevitably, I think, to my childhood.

There are people, and they are sometimes not a little tiresome, who remember everything they said, or did, or did not do from the moment they were born.

At once let me confess that I am not of their number.

It would be easy for me to put down on these pages the wonderful way in which at the age of seventeen months I was able to recite " Hamlet " backwards, or to recount how when I lay in my cradle one of my less removed and more elderly cousins breathed " Ah, what a beautiful baby. He will go far in life, but he must never touch sago pudding."

Alas, I have ever had a love for the truth, an

allegiance from which I have not too frequently allowed myself to be seduced . . . and I cannot tell such thundering lies. It is a pity. For my imagination has always got the worse of me, and I could, given the urge, invent childhood actions of staggering purpose and inexactitude.

Till the age of five I recall absolutely nothing. A tiresome aeroplane crash, of which I hope to tell later, helped the more completely to blot out all memory of my toddling, and doubtless, piffling days.

Providence has done its best to prevent my writing this book. That I have conquered a deal of my early shyness is here proved by the fact that at last I am daring to cut Providence dead.

Even into my later twenties I was, I repeat, shy and hyper-sensitive. Here I take my psychologist friend by the hand and prescribe an answer to this riddle. Would that all answers were as simple of achievement.

My Mother, who to my everlasting sorrow died when I was only twelve years old, had a love for me which, in these times, would be regarded as "hardly wise." She adored me . . . as I adored her . . . and shall ever adore her memory. But my mother's great love for me enwrapped me in such a hug of protective affection that as a small boy I could never even cross the road without her going through agonies of foreboding.

I recall the day when my father gave me a present of a tricycle.

The first time I was allowed to take out my new

steed and ride it round Kensington Court, the London square in which we lived, the scenes were such as are only witnessed at the departure of a dear one for Australia or a battalion of infantry setting out for the wars.

My Mother, who was ill at the time . . . she led a life of heroic endurance of illness . . . rose from her bed and watched me from her window as I pedalled sedately round the pavement. She would call to me " Darling, do be careful " at every revolution of my small feet (my feet are still annoyingly small). When a hansom cab, which dates me rather unkindly—whizzed past me, my Mother sent the servants out in a body to bring me back. It was more than she could endure.

Bad for me, you mutter. Possibly. " Must have been an odious child " hisses a colonel from his club perch. I do not honestly think so. I responded to affection, to tenderness and care as readily as a racing car responds to a flick of its driver's fingers. My childhood was spent in a constant and unceasing atmosphere of solicitude. If it was bad for me, it was bad only because later, when I was to be hurled into the world, I was to miss so tremendously the outward and visible signs of a fellow human being's tenderness.

Not to this moment have I been able to understand why it is " not done " to show affection to the people who claim our allegiance . . . who touch our hearts. We would all be so much better off . . . all go through our workaday lives so much

more happily and so much more efficiently if the word in season was not withheld for reasons of "bad form" or any other excuse for British emotional constipation.

When my Mother died I was truly lost. I shrunk into myself. My natural shyness grew more pronounced . . . for there was no one who looked at me quite in her way.

My father, a brilliant barrister and King's Counsel, who rose to great heights in his profession . . . the name of Vesey Knox is, I know, still widely remembered—had no time to hang out of windows while I tricycled into adolescence.

He was left with four children to bring up, my elder brother, John, aged fourteen, myself aged twelve, my sister Dilys, aged ten, who now has an enchanting child of her own, my nephew Christopher, and my little brother Noel, aged ten months.

It was Noel's entry into life which sealed my Mother's fate . . . for she was gravely ill with spine trouble at his birth. So wags the finger of Fate.

I see now how those early experiences of my life affected my growing-up days. How I always remained shy, how at a word of censure or ill-temper I would shrink as if struck with a whip. I still respond to kindness and appreciation, just as I used to do. It has been the same all through my kaleidoscope career, or careers.

My shyness and attendant complex is now passably cured . . . in the process of being knocked

My Mother
(from a Miniature).

My Father.

[*To face p. 6.*

about and having my head constantly bloody and as frequently bowed.

Cured did I say? Forget it. It will never say goodbye to me. But the world in which I move and work would take me to be very much cured. Which is all that really matters. We have to keep so many secrets to ourselves that another secret makes no odds.

My father was the kindest man I ever knew. The eldest of four brothers and two sisters, he was brought up in Ireland, at our home at Shimnah, Newcastle, County Down, and became at once the counsellor to whom they all looked for guidance. He ran the roost.

My grandmother, a woman of remarkable character, brought her children up with an iron hand. And it must be confessed that, considering the subsequent careers of her sons, she did her job well. I remember as a small boy playing backgammon with the old lady, for we children always spent our holidays in Ireland . . . and shaking in my tight shoes at a stupid move.

I never loved my grandmother, for on one occasion she was not too kind to my Mother, and that I could never forgive. But I admired her and was at times almost fond of her.

My father broke away as a young man and stormed London and the " Bar." While struggling to win briefs he contrived to find time to become a Member of Parliament for both County Londonderry and County Cavan. He met my Mother at a dance and promptly proposed to her. His courting

was carried out with that thoroughness which so characterised him.

He soon became the youngest King's Counsel at the Parliamentary Bar and it was just after he had " taken Silk " that he achieved a new and thrilling hold on my affection.

My father was taking part in a very dignified ceremony at the Law Courts, attended by the Lord Chief Justice and every other luminary of the legal profession. The new K.C.s were there in their new wigs and gowns. My father wrote to me to Wixenford at my preparatory school, where I was at the time, saying he would tell me all about it when he saw me.

He did not have to tell me. The newspapers told me the next day and several million of my fellow-citizens into the bargain.

The frantically dignified ceremony was about to begin when my father was called away for a moment . . . the Lord Chief wished to have a word in his ear. He returned in due season to find . . . that his seat had been most unlegally appropriated by a brother " Silk." The place reserved for Vesey Knox, K.C., had been snatched from under his very wig.

I was informed afterwards that this surreptitious act of the erring Silk was unprecedented on such an occasion of solemnity. The rest of the assembly stared aghast. So did my father.

A man of great self-control, he could be quick to anger. Any act of injustice was to him a mortal insult. His second son inherits that trait.

My father politely, though acidly, asked the interloper to move away, adding that it was not his rightful seat. The seat-crasher refused to budge.

Whereupon my father crimsoned with rage and hit the intruder a terrific smack in the eye.

What small talents I may have at descriptive writing could never hope adequately to portray the hush of horror that fell over the concourse. Only a Bateman could do it justice. But the culprit, nursing a blackening eye, retreated in disorder and Vesey Knox, K.C., sank with a sigh of content into his appointed place.

That episode made history at the Bar. It also made a heaven-sent splash story for the newspapers.

I was eating my breakfast at my school the next day like a good little boy, with all the other good little boys, when the Headmaster entered. His gaze roamed round the room. It lit upon me. My mouth was full of porridge at the time.

" Young Knox," said the Headmaster, " come here. And look at this." And he unfolded to my goggling eyes a large sheet which appeared to be covered with the name of Knox in satanic black. " Two K.C.s fight." " K.C. takes the count in court ceremony." " Knox *versus* Blank in court prize fight " . . . " Lord Chief Justice to hold an enquiry." My eyes swam.

" Is that my father, sir ? " I ventured.

The Head nodded . . . by this time the whole school was listening with every ear cocked. " Pretty good, what ? " added this surprising headmaster. " Never thought your father had it in

him, eh? You'll be getting your name in the papers some day, my boy." And off he chuckled out of the room.

A prophetic utterance . . . and also an utterance fraught with much thought for me. In a flash my father changed in my eyes. I could have hugged him. I felt so proud. For a long while afterwards my fellow-scholars, save the mark, were wont to point me out to their visiting relatives with an awed "That is Knox . . . son of the K.C., you know, who . . ."

From that time I was determined, first to keep always on the right side of my father, and secondly, to see my name in large type in a newspaper. Both ambitions I ultimately achieved. My father lived to see the first pious wish accomplished . . . but, sadly, not the second.

One hot day four years ago I stood in Piccadilly Circus. There was a more than usually traffic jam. Omnibuses were ranged round the Circus . . . you could have leaped from one deck to the next, like the trapeze artist, with the greatest of ease.

And spread right across the side of each 'bus there flamed . . . to my intense fright, the words "Read Collie Knox" in immense letters.

I shook with terror, for I knew that I would have to live up to such a blazoning of my humble self . . . but I also lifted my eyes to the sun and wished that my father had been standing by my side.

A sentimental moment, maybe . . . but one of which I am not ashamed. I never am ashamed, somehow, of sentiment. But I hope my father

" saw " from wherever he was. I know that he chuckled. And I know that he was proud. And I know that he was surprised.

For he once said to me, " Collie, you are the laziest boy I have ever known. What will become of you ? " He was right. I was bone idle for too many years. I was as lazy as I dared be. But I always hoped sometime my father would see fit to take back those words of censure.

Something told me that on that day, that very hot day in Piccadilly Circus, he did take them back. All of them.

Now memories crowd in upon me and the past comes rushing back . . . but most of it is of no interest to anyone but myself. But things have a way, have they not, of working themselves out ? A way of bringing that little lump to the throat, a lump of which all true Britons are so ashamed.

My uncles, too, had at regular intervals told my father that Collie would never do any good. One of them was General Sir Harry Knox, Adjutant-General to the Forces, till the energetic War Minister, Mr. Leslie Hore-Belisha, becoming old-age conscious overnight, sent him into retirement with Field-Marshal Sir Cyril Deverell, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and the other is Major-General Sir Alfred Knox, M.P. for High Wycombe . . . grand men both of them and as charming as they are clever. Though I always had more in common with my Mother's brother, Thomas Lloyd, who lived—and died—on his farm in Wales, and was extremely lovable.

But now my Knox uncles look on me as something that is hardly true. I am sure, bless their hearts, that they would have felt more pleased had I been sent out to Australia with a second-class single ticket and a family Bible. Distinguished generals do not like to be proven extinguished prophets.

No tale with an autobiographical flavour is deemed to be complete without a satisfyingly full-blooded reference to the schooldays, private and public, of the victim. And if he can write with gory accuracy of welters of immorality and frenzied passions for the captain of the cricket eleven, so much the better for the sales at the hands of the salacious.

But I have no story I wish to tell of the purple spots of adolescence. And, if I had I would not tell it. For such happenings, when and if they happen, as we all know they do . . . and inevitably must to some boys . . . have little or nothing to do with the real character of the child . . . or with his place as a good citizen in after-life.

My first private school was at Wixenford, near Wokingham, in Berkshire, and it was extremely exclusive and appallingly expensive. We all had our own horses and every second boy was either a peer of the realm or the son of an American millionaire. We were fed like kings, given as little work to do as possible, and looked after like a father by our Headmaster, the late Philip Morton. He was a first-class cricketer and was wont to get down W. G. Grace for our cricket week, for which we all loved him.

MYSELF—WHEN VERY YOUNG.

[*To face p.* 12.

One day my father came down, observed with pain that I was learning nothing for a great deal of money, and that few of my companions were ever likely to be called upon to earn their own livings. So, to my intense disgust, he took me away and sent me to the Wick at Brighton, an admirable school with a hearty cold-bath outlook on the bringing-up of boys and one of the most excellent headmasters this country has ever known.

Some men will never handle boys till the day they die. Some men are born to rule over the very young. So it was with L. T. Thring. He only had one eye, but that eye could see through a brick wall. He had also a technique of caning which was the grudging envy even of his victims.

Thring and his sister, a truly formidable woman, but a dear, taught me more in a short space of time than I would have deemed possible. They ruled together, and turned out into the maw of public schools specimens of boys who were not prigs but merely healthy, well-fed, well-schooled, well-caned animals.

I owe Mr. and Miss Thring a very great debt . . . and I often think of them both with an affection which would cause both of them considerable surprise were they aware of it.

My fellow-schoolmates, almost to a boy, lie in graves in France, in Gallipoli or in other resting places which took their young bodies and hid them for ever from a mad world.

That boy there, a particular friend of mine, who used to make me look at the stars with him and

forced me to listen to the ghastly poems he wrote . . . he lies somewhere in France. Another springs to mind . . . a slim, gay creature who was for ever laughing, and was for ever frightened of the dark. He died defending a deserted machine-gun emplacement and his Victoria Cross was sent to his mother. He is laughing still, I wager, and is as gay and as slender as ever he was.

Poor L.T.T. who brought up his flock . . . so many, many boys—in the way he thought they would go . . . but the way he had intended was not the way all flesh went in those awful four years. God rest them all.

It was only by the mercy of a miraculous providence that I did not make yet another of that gay, mischievous and gallant company. But, as Kipling said, and no saying is ever more maddeningly quoted, " that is another story."

From the Wick I was disgorged into Rugby, a public school which has suffered too much at the hands of " Tom Brown's Schooldays." There I spent four and a half years of happiness, boredom and comradeship.

Here, you will aver, should follow the juicy bits. The public school cue screams to be taken. But we must at all costs avoid the obvious.

Boldly let me state that I was rather a good-looking boy at that period. My shyness, which gave me undiluted inward hell, was, for some reason, considered attractive and winning. I looked reasonably clean and I had the sort of face which made old ladies, sentimental schoolmasters and older boys

long to " take care " of me. This I knew full well, and very soon I was able to assume an appealing " I-am-so-bewildered " expression at a moment's notice.

Added to all this my hair stood straight up on end . . . which also proved very taking to the motherly —and was a source of continual annoyance to myself.

Like most boys of fifteen I knew what was best for me in the surroundings in which I was due for some years to live and have my being. Everyone seemed to enjoy mothering me and doing my Prep. for me, so why not jolly well let them ?

It is asinine to be given natural advantages for avoiding hard work at school, without taking full advantage of them. This may be subversive doctrine for the young, but it is only human.

The Captain of the Cricket Eleven did not, if I remember rightly, gaze deep into my eyes and swear eternal devotion. Nor did the head boy of my House make come hither faces at me in Chapel. But both these worthies did certainly fuss over me not inconsiderably . . . and I played up for all I was worth, though still retaining that rather debunking sense of humour which is even now the despair of my associates.

A vast deal of nonsense, pernicious nonsense at that, is talked and written about immoral friendships at public schools. Such friendships exist, of course, but if you shut up six or seven hundred boys between the ages of fourteen and nineteen and deprive them of all female companionship, what is to be expected ?

Romantic friendships, yes. They are as universal and as natural as coughing in church. The almost maternal . . . not so much paternal . . . care of the big boy for the smaller boy, and the hero worship of the "kid" for the eighteen-year-old, especially if the idol shines on the playing fields, does much that is good for the character of everyone concerned. If tempered with sense, discretion and decency, as it nearly always is.

After all, this ever-present public school problem . . . not that it is worth calling a problem . . . is simple of explanation. All little boys, like all little girls, are natural flirts. There is no harm in flirting, and if there were no one could do anything about it. The only difference between the sexes is that when the little boys grow up to be big boys they cease to be flirts, or certainly should so cease, and when the little girls become big girls they become greater flirts than ever. Or should.

Well meaning, but most damnable asses, in the shape of visiting preachers, take a sadistic delight in coming down to schools and preaching in Chapel on subjects which, did they but realise it, turn their young congregations pale with horror.

There does not exist a human being so jealous of the sanctity, the privacy of his inner feelings as the genus, boy. He shies away from the prober like a startled horse.

To have to be obliged to listen to a footling idiot accusing him in front of a packed chapel, including every assistant master and his Headmaster, of

thoughts which have never entered his healthy young head is an outrage against decency.

A poisonous representative of these "exhibitionist" pests preached one Sunday at Rugby. Before he had said ten words we boys knew what we were in for. He laid bare our innermost fears . . . and insulted us with every sentence he mouthed. He shocked us to the innermost roots of our beings. The whole time his pasty, shifty face and sadistic eyes shone with unholy ecstasy.

A boy began to tap his foot. A master frowned. Another boy took up the tapping . . . and then another. Gradually fourteen hundred feet belonging to seven hundred boys, went crashing against the sides of the pews. The obscenity in the pulpit could not be heard. The preacher gave it up and left his perch.

And, moreover, the preacher was wise.

The Headmaster, Dr. A. A. David, now Bishop of Liverpool, made no move to stop the barracking in Chapel. He sat like a graven image. But his eyes were blazing with fury . . . at the preacher. I would go so far as to say that a keen eye would have noted one dignified foot of the Headmaster of Rugby helping the hymn of hate along.

That action would have been typical of Dr. David. A man of terrific personality, with one of the most sonorous speaking voices I have ever heard, he was always . . . but always . . . a human being first and a Headmaster afterwards.

He did a vast deal for Rugby. Ian Hay once averred that a great Headmaster . . . as David

assuredly was . . . must have in him every quality that goes to make a great Prime Minister. Their responsibilities to posterity are equally heavy.

There is a story of Dr. David I love to tell. An incident he will long ago have forgotten . . . an incident which will linger long in my memory.

At the end of my second term a dear friend of mine, Michael Fitzroy, left to go to the war which had then just begun. He was one of the baby officers who were so curtly called upon to put away childish things and were turned overnight into grown men at the word of command.

At Rugby I was Michael's fag. He was kind to me, and even as a small boy I was able to see signs of the fine man he must have become. Had Fate allowed him the chance.

He went out to France in a Highland regiment and was killed almost immediately. I was sixteen, and at sixteen the sorrow of death is well nigh overwhelming. One has had no time in which to work out a philosophy of living . . . let alone a philosophy of dying.

Very sad at heart, I was walking down to early school with my books under my arm when I spied the tall figure of Dr. David looming towards me. He beckoned. I was surprised. I had never spoken to the Headmaster, not being either in his house nor in his elevated form. To him I must only have been just another boy in a herd of hundreds. And yet . . .

He called me by name. Running up, I took off my cap and wondered what was coming. He looked at me closely and took my arm.

"Terribly sad about Fitzroy, Knox," he said. "I liked him. A rare person. I know how you feel. It's just part of it all—it's just part of it all." With an understanding smile and a nod of farewell he strode away.

How did he know that I had lost my best friend? How did he know that the loss was tugging at my inarticulate heart?

Yes, David is a grand person.

The other day another fag-master of mine, P. H. B. Lyon, became Headmaster of Rugby at a very early age for such a post. I told him about this episode when I went down to see him in all his glory. It was strange to see a man I knew as a fellow-schoolboy now ruling over the school wherein I had first known him.

"It was just like David," he told me. "I am glad you told me. Michael was my greatest friend, too."

Strange indeed.

My later days at school were so inevitably mixed up with the days of War . . . for I knew that the Army was my future, as it had perforce to be the future of every boy of my age "for the duration." But none of us could say for how long our country would be called on to endure. Or its sons to perish.

I shall not tell in this odd history of a not uninteresting life—to date—too much of what I did . . . or did not do, in the Great Folly. What I did I did because the fellow next door was doing it too. I won no medals. I saved no life and I never thought for one instant that War was glorious . . . that war

was anything but heartbreaking, dull at times, often exceedingly frightening, and always unbelievably stupid.

The generation who now hold the stage . . . and the Peace of the world in their young hands . . . can only look on the War as a page from a history book.

Most of my war memories I keep to myself, for they are to me too sacred to be blazoned in Neon lighting, and can have no possible meaning for anyone else.

But the memories of bravery and that spirit of comradeship which, as Noel Coward so truly said, made a strange grandeur out of unbelievable hell, have sustained me in my struggles along the way and will so sustain me to the end.

You know how at times we do something with no apparent reason. You know also the feeling which, all unconsciously, is vague—yet impelling. And afterwards we thank the gods that our steps were guided so unerringly.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of this that has come my way in life is connected with my elder brother John . . . who was killed towards the end of the war.

He joined up at the outset and served in the Infantry for three hideous years in the trenches. He then determined to join the Royal Flying Corps, and came home for training. I myself, then unfit for further military service, was on the staff in London at the Horse Guards.

One day he wired me from Norwich, where he

was learning to fly, that he was crossing to Shimnah, our home in Northern Ireland, on a few days' leave and would like to see me as he passed through London.

Would I meet him at our London house to see him as he passed through on his journey? I hurried back from the Horse Guards and arrived home first.

Then suddenly an extraordinary feeling came over me. I felt that somehow this should be a celebration of some kind. An Occasion. What kind, or why, I did not know. For it appeared all rather absurd . . . after all my brother was only going home to Ireland on leave and how could there be any occasion for celebrations in that?

As I waited alone in the house . . . my father was away . . . the feeling grew stronger. Yes, I said to myself, this must be a celebration. A bottle of champagne must be broached. As my father, prudent man, had taken with him the key of the wine cellar, there was nothing left for it but to break the cellar door open. Which I did, growing more and more amazed at myself.

I collared a bottle of Bollinger 1906, I think it was, routed out two champagne glasses and awaited my brother's coming.

His key rattled in the lock of the front door and in a moment John stood smiling . . . he had a singularly attractive smile. He greeted me. There passed the usual inarticulate nothingnesses which always pass between two brothers. Then his eyes fell on the champagne bottle . . . the glasses, and my extremely self-conscious look.

" Why the champagne ? " he said. " What's the anniversary ? " For I did not usually greet him with so expensive an air.

I mumbled something about how I thought it would do him good for the journey . . . the Channel rough and all that . . . and why did he look such a gift course in the mouth ? And I poured out two glasses.

" Well," he said, " it's jolly decent of you, I must say . . . Never expected this." Together we solemnly drank. By this time I had become more and more embarrassed and I was glad in a way when the time came for him to rush away to catch his train.

" Well, good-bye, Collie," he cried. " My luggage is on ahead, so I'll walk to a taxi. Thanks for the surprise."

I stood at the front door and watched him as he walked to the end of the street. Then, to my puzzlement, he turned—came back and stood looking at me from the pavement. " Well," he said shyly, " er—good-bye, old chap. God bless you."

With that he ran to the corner and disappeared.

I never saw him again, alive. He returned a week later from Ireland. He went straight back to the aerodrome at Norwich and was killed the following day when his machine stalled at only sixty feet and came down in flames. He was burned to death.

I never drink champagne now without my memory clicking back to that evening. Why was I so certain we had to have a celebration ? What force impelled me to brave my father's wrath and

break down the cellar door . . . why did my brother turn back from the corner of the street? I can only feel thankful that it was so. We were both moved by a force beyond ourselves.

My father died soon after. He never recovered from the shock. John, his first-born, was ever his favourite.

With my mother, my father and elder brother gone, I felt it time I began to grow up. For I had always been rather young for my age. I had now to tackle life as best I could.

So, with a prayer in my heart to those who were departed to keep a loving eye on me from wherever they were, I took a long breath . . . and set out in earnest towards whatever Fate awaited me.

Like the rest of mankind I realised that my feet would often walk in the gutter.

I was determined, however, that occasionally my eyes would lift to the stars.

## CHAPTER TWO

A DISILLUSIONED man who has only lately refrained from felling tree trunks in Holland made up my mind for me in the choice of a career.

When a German Emperor took to putting out the lights of Europe and constituted himself Public Gravedigger Number One for the Youth of an epoch, I was exercising my young mind over what, as my uncles had it . . . Was to become of the boy.

I had leanings towards following in the learned steps of my father and taking the Parliamentary Bar by storm, though the Criminal Bar actually excited my interest more, since I had first heard Lord Carson cross-examining a witness to a pulp. But my parent was without doubt a highly successful King's Counsel, my godfather was Sir Samuel Evans, then Solicitor-General and later President of the Divorce Court, and my father's greatest friend was that remarkable and sagacious lawyer, Sir Charles Russell.

So the Law was ever about my path and about my bed. These three wise men . . . I can never really believe that all three are dead . . . were my constant delight. I was privileged to spend many hours listening to their talk. I always have been a good listener. Had I a son I would hang the

maxim " Be a good listener " over his cot. It is a virtue which yields a hundred per cent. return.

Naturally I hankered after the Law. But my mind was not by nature legal, and my father knew it. My father knew most things, I found.

Then like many boys of rather repressed instincts and affectionate natures, I had a yearning to go on the stage. This urge was perhaps more understandable. Since my very early years the stage and the quaint, egotistical and lovable folk who strut their little hours upon it, had fascinated me. The strutters fascinate me no longer. But the stage, proper or improper, still does. Ask who played the first seven leading *rôles* in any play, musical comedy or revue which I have endured since the age of ten, and I will give you them pat.

Most of my life I have accumulated a vast store of such useless knowledge. Yet maybe not so useless after all. For much of it has come in mighty useful in after times. Which proves my oft-repeated contention that a child, entirely unwittingly, assimilates knowledge of that branch of learning or art which will prove destined to fill his energies when he reaches manhood . . . or soon after.

A child is, of course, admonished not to waste time on storing up treasure in a heaven which his parents and relatives are determined he shall never enter. But a child usually knows best. He may, through family pressure or a foreign maniac's lust for Power enter one or more of the obvious professions. But he will return to his first love. Not that he knew it was his first love. Few of us

recognise love in any guise when first we meet it.

The Great War elected to break out while I was watching a cricket match at Lord's. It chose a perfect day in which to do it. The ground was packed with a mixture of comatose and eager spectators. The sun broiled down on the just and the unjust, as is its way . . . and on twenty-two handsome "flannelled fools" from Rugby and Marlborough.

There would come the click, click of a ball meeting a bat, and much dashing backwards and forwards. Someone would yell "Oh, well PLAYED, sir," and two old boys in the corner would remember that one of the schools in 1885 boasted a wizard, Smith Major, who had made that exact stroke "just like that." And they would sigh. I heard them sigh. That day I was to hear the world sigh.

Nine out of that blue-shirted Rugby cricket eleven soon lay buried under Flanders mud. The neat little crosses which mark their graves are still as white as were the flannel trousers they wore that sunny day.

Libraries of books have been written of the glory and self-sacrifice of Youth during the War. Youth was worshipped and put on a pedestal, vastly embarrassing as a foothold to young feet. I will not add to that worship, though my heart bids me do so. Suffice it that my fellow children saw their duty plain. And did it . . . that the smile of death on the face of a seventeen-year-old boy is at once the most poignant and the most beautiful upon which the eye of man may gaze.

It struck me as all wrong that I had to go back to Rugby for another term while those but a few months older than myself were looking all glorious to behold in khaki. But I was too young then even for that slaughter. The lambs had to be fattened for the feast of blood. Towards the end of the War it did not matter very much how lean a baby manned a trench. But at first only the very fit and the very cream of youth were deemed worthy of so supreme a sacrificial honour.

So Youth went leaping towards its hell. With all its faculties in tip-top shape and its pink young flesh ripe for the butcher's knife.

All of us when at school have our heroes. I had two such. One the elegant youth, Michael Fitzroy, of whom I have told, and the other, the brilliant scholar and a poet, P. H. B. Lyon. Michael was destined to form part of the shambles. Hugh—once my fag-master—is doing very well as Headmaster of Rugby, with a well-won Military Cross to his credit and not too much of the poet knocked out of him.

At the end of my last term I came up to London for something or other, and was taken to a musical show at the Hippodrome, one of those extravaganzas which so heartened the homecomer from the Front, and as such have their special place in theatrical history. Though all history was growing a bit theatrical at that time.

Many a boy was to face death with a much lighter heart after a sight of George Robey or Violet Loraine. No compliment was ever meant

to be less double-edged. These two grand artistes and splendid hearted people, whom later I was to know well, did better than they knew. Many of the host of Heaven are, I make no doubt, gazing down at them and their like with affection.

Among the audience I noticed a very young officer in the smart kit of the Seaforth Highlanders. He was sitting in the row in front of me. I thought how grand he looked. His face wore an expression of attractive superiority. That look I knew of old.

We met in the gangway in an interval. "Hullo, Michael," I said, "you ARE smart. I expect I shall be seeing you in France soon."

He smiled with that tolerant and whimsical air with which he had been wont to regard me at school.

"Rather," he replied. "But you'll have to hurry up. I am going to the Front to-morrow. Come and see me off?" But I did not go. I was seeing him off then and realised as one does sometimes, that I was seeing him off for eternity. He was killed within a fortnight.

His death, for he was my first real friend, made me determined to pass into Sandhurst with all possible speed. This feat I accomplished. By virtue of the fact that the authorities had decided that it was not necessary for those "about to die" to pass an examination in order to do it.

Everything struck me as being terribly strange at Sandhurst. Which was hardly surprising. I was never cut out for army life . . . though I stuck it for ten years. I have never been able to get into

my head that because an order is given by a man occupying a higher position, the order must necessarily be right. It is not in my head yet. This failing has caused me a good deal of trouble.

It was incredible that we youngsters were able to stand up to those ten months of intensive training. Parades . . . lectures . . . route marches . . . more parades. Blown out of our beds by bugles at very small hours of mornings we were made to endure, with packs, thirty-mile route marches. Route marches that no boy of seventeen or eighteen should ever have been compelled to face. Some of us used to fall by the wayside and be collected in lorries later . . . or some fainted at convenient spots. Time after time I have dragged myself back and tumbled on my bed and been violently sick from sheer exhaustion. It could not have been good for any of us. But we supposed it was all for our country's honour . . . and that thought made it bearable.

Our Chaplain—the Reverend Edward Woods—was a fine fellow. Many a chat I had with him in his cosy quarters . . . when I was faint at heart or when I wondered vaguely at the curious atmosphere of physical non-morality which surrounded this home for young gentlemen. He soothed and " explained " to me.

I had first met him when he was in charge of a tiny little English church at Lausanne in Switzerland. He managed to fill his church every Sunday by a combination of man-to-man talks and a winning personality. He was a Double Blue and

that stood for something. Though why one should be deemed more fitted to preach the word of God through an ability to hit a golf ball further than the next sinner escapes me. But it is so. And maybe it is not such a bad thing after all. But it is apt to give the earnest seeker after truth incessant palpitations.

Woods was singularly unlike a clergyman of those days. This is tantamount to saying he was a wonderfully effective parson. It always is. At Sandhurst he was universally liked and trusted. He stimulated the cadets with heart-to-heart talks before they passed out . . . preparatory to their passing out in France.

Woods became a bishop . . . first of Croydon and then of Lichfield. Croydon was fortunate. Lichfield remains fortunate.

His parting advice to me was " Don't make an agony of your religion, young Knox. It won't bite you."

When I left Sandhurst, physically fitter than I have ever been before or since, I officially joined the Queen's Royal Regiment, but elected to be seconded to the Royal Flying Corps . . . there was no Royal Air Force then.

Why I made this decision I have never been able to imagine. I am not mechanically minded, and never have been. At the language of the sparking plug I am an idiot. Added to this I could never regard an aeroplane without alarm. It probably was that I had heard from my elder brother of the unimaginable discomfort and terror of life in the

trenches and I preferred the clear air to rats and lice. Very unheroic reasons, but the right ones.

But some of my relatives told me it was very brave of me to go in for flying. I did not contradict them. I never contradict my elders. Much.

Of all my experiences during the early part of my war . . . experiences which covered no one, myself least of all, with glory, one or two adhere like sticking-plaster to the memory. The passing of the years does nothing to budge them. It is ever thus. We must all carry something locked away in our memory to take out occasionally, turn over, and then neatly put back in store again.

The Flying Centre which was to have the doubtful privileges of my services, was at Farnborough, where Colonel, later Brigadier-General, and now Air-Commodore L. E. O. Charlton, was in command. To every man his title. To every man his due.

It would not be difficult to write a book about Charlton. Never have I met a man with so many sides to him. He was an extraordinary mixture of dilettante and soldier, of writer and poet. He fought in the War with the same spirit and pluck with which later he was to fight against the authority of those superior ranks whose motives he doubted—and bravely questioned.

He was a born leader who chafed under leadership. An inspired mentor of youth, he was ever a person who cared nought what the world thought. He wrote a book . . . his first it was . . . — called " Charlton "—which shocked a number of people profoundly . . . and enjoyed the proceed-

ings immensely. The purpose of the book was to show that a man has the right to go his own way in life and if people do not like it, well, be damned to them.

This attitude is unfailing in its shocking powers to the sheep who bleat amongst us.

Colonel Charlton—for all flying officers bore military titles in those days—had a beautiful home in Chelsea to which he was accustomed to dash at week-ends when possible. He invited there at various times several of his young officers, believing in the principle of on parade, on parade . . . off parade, off parade. Which made the officers realise that they were being treated and regarded as human beings, which is always good for officers. And for men.

This house boasted a swimming-bath of which I have happy memories. Particularly one occasion when, honoured with an invitation from my commanding officer, I was treated to the rare and refreshing sight of one of the guests, a General home on four days' leave after a herculean task, standing on the edge of the bath stark naked except for a sword and a brass hat.

With a wild cry of " So much for the Divisional Commander," he toppled headlong into the water.

All excessively reprehensible no doubt. But in those days it was possible to behave in such a fashion. Had the General in question . . . in the bath . . . given me a whigging the following day for some army misdemeanour, I would have seen

nothing incongruous, or unfair, in the carpeting. Nor would the General. There was after all " a War on " and if a subaltern had been privileged to see an overworked and harassed General from France letting himself go for a few hours, the subaltern was not expected to behave like a cad about it.

I like to think . . . and the thought is near to reality . . . that during the War all over the British Isles platoons of generals were falling into swimming-baths in front of subalterns. Nowadays such goings-on would start a revolution. But during the War some of us found a sense of proportion the while the rest of mankind were losing theirs.

Time marches on, so we are told . . . and my mind goes to a day when, very neatly at attention, I stood in Colonel Charlton's office. He told me that I had been chosen by him to escort a draft of one hundred men over to France.

" You will be in charge of the men till St. Omer," he added, " I am sending Sergeant Romer with you."

Gulping slightly, for I was just eighteen, I saluted and fell out of the Orderly Room door. I was always very nervous and highly strung, and till much later in life was the type who shrinks a little from responsibility. A slight stammer did little to reassure me. People such as I had to be taught swimming by total immersion.

All this the Colonel knew, which was the real reason he had chosen me, a raw and inexperienced young officer, to waft one hundred fully-grown men

across the Channel and deliver them, in good order, over to what awaited them.

The question of personality is a curious thing. It has little to do with birth or whether its possessor eats peas with a knife. No one has ever been able to explain personality . . . for the admirable reason that it is unexplainable. Or is inexplicable the word? It baffles . . . does personality and is as elusive as the truth in a Divorce Court.

In my life I have been lucky enough to meet many remarkable men and women. I have felt instantly drawn towards some of them. In the way one does to anyone on one's own wavelength. The parallel between the miracle of radio and the miracle of human attraction springs instantly to the mind. One is as impossibly simple as the other. In the company of those who dwell in memory's shrine I delight to place Sergeant Romer.

The Sergeant was a giant of six feet five, with a chest measurement which the muscular heroes in the advertisements would have envied. This was the genie who was to assist me in transporting my lambs to the slaughter across the sea.

On the day of departure . . . with all the far-from-merry men lined up like unwilling automatons on parade, the Sergeant reported to me all " present and correct; ready to march off, sir." With a terrific salute. Verily a very prince of a sergeant.

Stiff as a ramrod he stood. He surveyed me and took me in from the top of my perky new cap to the heels of my blushingly virgin field boots.

I knew what he was saying. . . . " Looks about

fifteen " (alas, this was true). " Scared to death . . . straight from Sandhurst . . . quite a nice baby. Well, I'm paid to look after babies."

And look after the baby he did. A patient, highly efficient nurse, my sergeant. With imperturbable precision and a frightening competence, Romer took that draft, and me, along with it, over to France. By dint of the unstinting use of a tact which would have made his fortune in the Diplomatic Service, Romer never for one instant made me feel that to all purposes and intents he wore the second lieutenant's " pips " on his shoulder and I the sergeant's stripes. I felt deep gratitude towards him . . . the gratitude of a baby towards his nurse.

We braved the Channel in a blizzard. We landed in Havre at an unearthly hour in the morning. That not too pleasant town loomed large and grey as if telling the unfortunates who were daily decanted on its docks that in the words of a popular song of that time they " ain't seen nothing yet."

The men formed up and with me at their head and the ever-watchful Romer a pace or two behind me, we marched as gaily as possible through the misty streets. A damp crowd of loafers gave us a strangled cheer and a girl in black ran up and waved a torn Union Jack in my face. This war of ours is becoming very tawdry, I mused. But I felt proud in a sixth form way. For after all these were my men and their bearing could not but reflect on their officer. I was losing myself in such sublime reflections when a voice in my ear " hoarsed " " Give eyes right, sir."

Romer had spoken. Romer knew. He always knew. Having no notion of why I should give eyes right to an apparently empty street, I duly shrilled out the order and lifted my right hand to the approved salute.

And a General and his A.D.C., apparently walking home to breakfast, returned our greeting. Well pleased, so I was told later by Romer. If Romer said that there was a general there, well, there was a General there.

His eyes were more perfectly attuned to Generals than mine. And Romer, I must rather monotonously repeat, was always right.

Followed two ghastly days and nights in a first-class carriage with five other officers . . . the journey should by rights take about six hours. At last we arrived in St. Omer . . . the men having ridden in trucks labelled " For horses only." The war left none of us with a superiority complex.

The men gave me a cheer before I left them . . . though I hoped it was Romer they were cheering. They were good fellows and deserved a better fate. As did all the patient people who manned our warlike forces.

My nurse and I arrived in Boulogne at four o'clock in the morning. The rain came down in torrents. Both of us were tired out and hungry, and I felt I could burst into tears at any moment. We staggered along half blinded and I knew I could not go on much longer. No boy can go without a full-night's sleep for three days and retain his *joie de vivre.*

Along a narrow, ill-lit street we struggled. We had to find some place to rest. A light shone drearily in a window with dirty blinds.

"I'll knock someone up, sir," said Romer. "They can't very well turn us away at this hour." And Romer knocked. And behold it was opened unto him. By a slatternly looking woman, with a blowsy figure and a wet, vicious mouth.

"Officer, English officer," said Romer in villainous French. "We want beds."

The female glared at us and made as if to slam the door in our faces. Then relented, and growled "Only one room . . . one bed . . . you can have that . . . this way." Bearing a guttering candle aloft like a banner, she ushered us into a vast, dirty-looking room . . . boasting the one bed and a rickety washstand. She blew in our faces and tottered off.

The bed was extremely large. "Come on, Romer," I said. "You'll have to share it with me," and collapsed on the filthy floor.

Romer pulled off my boots, and my more wieldy articles of clothing and put me into bed. He even tucked me up. He could have kissed me for all I cared. Nurses always did kiss me. I had that sort of face. He took off his own boots, and tunic, and lay down on the floor at the foot of the bed.

I protested. "Don't be an ass, Romer," I said. "Get into bed. You need sleep as much as I do."

"Go to sleep yourself, damn you," replied this surprising Romer.

It was (I believe I have mentioned this) a very peculiar War.

Next day officer and non-commissioned officer, I and Romer reached our own, our native land. Back to Farnborough we went . . . Romer solicitous as ever . . . respectful . . . the perfect Sergeant . . . his " nursehood " laid away.

As we strolled up to the Headquarters Office a brother officer of mine . . . afterwards to win, and deserve, the Victoria Cross . . . called out to me " Ah, Collie, my lad, back from the wicked land. . . . Been sleeping in any brothels ? "

Indignantly I denied the assumption. I really was desperately young for my age. Scarlet in the face I stalked on. We reached the Headquarters. I turned to Romer. And held out my hand.

" Thank you, Sergeant," I said, " you've been damned decent."

" That's all right, sir," he replied, and walked off. Suddenly he turned and came back to me . . . and said . . . " But *YOU HAVE*, you know, sir."

I smiled as I remembered his sleeping form at the foot of my bed.

O noble Romer, how I do honour thee !

I have lost touch with the worthy sergeant these many years. It is to me a sad thing that one does so often lose touch with those who have functioned as milestones on one's way. When in our busy lives we have the time to stroll back along the road up which we have toiled, the sight of the easily forgotten milestones . . . some covered with moss

and damp and hardly recognisable . . . make our brains go click.

Of course I remember . . . I remember . . . I remember, we say . . . and we live again as if it were yesterday the sights and scenes which were so soon to fade.

There is so much to do. So little time indeed in which to do it . . . for verily here again the preacher was learned. We are too busy to remember . . . we are too eagerly looking ahead . . . blindly groping our way.

It is a pity, I think. To live in the past may not be healthy . . . nor profitable. But it does us no harm to pay fleeting visits to the lands of the mist.

My second war memory is not really a memory. It is ever with me. It taught me a lesson I can never forget . . . how gentle and unfrightening shall be the change from life to death. A stumble, that is all. Like tripping up over a stone as we travel. Just that and nothing more. Nothing more.

I have been privileged to be very near to death . . . snatched back like a child from the fire. Privileged, I say, because it is easier to learn how to live after we have been taught how to die.

When I was flying in contraptions courteously called aeroplanes, there was never any foolproof nonsense about them. We were ordered to " take up " whatever piece of scrap iron happening to be lying about at the moment. Even if the atrocity appeared to the tutored eye to be held together only by bits of string and the simple faith of its designer.

Their's not to reason why—their's but to do and

fly. Tennyson, thou should'st have been living at that hour !

I had just won my " wings." A proud, surprised moment . . . something achieved after a period of intense fright and acute nervous exhaustion. Getting one's wings meant that the wearers thereof were permitted to lose their lives officially. So important. An extinction with a difference.

If a boy crashed while struggling for his accolade the authorities enquired whether he had earned his wings. If he crashed as a fully-fledged pilot he received a free pass to Paradise, portentously endorsed by the Air Ministry and the aeroplane manufacturers of the country.

One bitterly cold day, with the wind rollicking around the hangars, I and my comrades of the " Flight " were all present and correct. We wore our pretty-looking flying suits as per schedule and waited for our Squadron Commander to give the order " No flying to-day." We were certain that even that martinet . . . commonly known to the elect as " Pieface " . . . would decide that to-day at any rate the sky was definitely the limit.

Not at all. Pieface was liverish. He sent the other fellows back to the Mess, whither they wended their ways rejoicing. And he beckoned to me. I had never greatly cared for him — an earthy mortal for an airman.

" You have some flying hours to make up," he growled. " Take up that 'bus."

So saying he pointed to a tattered-looking Bleriot monoplane. On a fine day the Bleriots . . . even

then they were out of date . . . were demons from hell. They were so constructed that the pilot sat perched up high above the rest of his craft . . . like a stuffed pig. The slightest wind that blew had a somersault effect on the machines. I had been fated to take up these infernal gas-cookers on several occasions, and they frightened me to death. Anyway, on such a day as this. . . .

Rather nervously I enquired of my tormentor if he realised that the machine in question was long past its prime, and that I was too young to die. Upon which a mechanic standing near—a pal of mine—made sympathetic noises.

"Do what you are told," came the reply. So there was nothing for it.

I yanked the machine into the sky. It was a damnable day. It was all I could do to keep the machine the right way up. A devil of a lot of "pockets" about. So I climbed higher. And suddenly the wind died down . . . and when I had reached a thousand feet the shy sun flecked the clouds with blue. My spirits cheered and I began to hum "Gilbert the Filbert," for I was ever happy to sing as I went.

On we sailed. . . . The aeroplane actually behaved itself—when there struck on my ears a sound as if a giant had torn in half a shop-full of calico.

Then a shrieking sound . . . as the wind whistled through . . . and down plunged the nose of the machine. It was beyond the power of mortal man to get a Bleriot out of a nose dive. The sudden rush

of air must have checked my consciousness for a moment, for I never had time to switch the engine off.

I saw the earth rushing up towards me, and I knew that here was the end. Blinding clear and unafraid I knew it. It seemed an eternity till we hit the ground at a hundred and twelve miles an hour. . . . In that time I was conscious of a great calm. I even folded my arms, I remember . . . and to this very hour I recall wondering why people made such a fuss about death. It is nothing, this ! My friends will like to know about this, I thought. I must tell them. . . . Crash !

Two hours later I recovered consciousness in a mortuary.

Perhaps you have never made a mortuary slab your resting place. Not even the house agent who let me my last flat would have the nerve to describe it as a salubrious residence.

I did not know where I was, of course. I woke up to hear someone cry " Good God ! He's alive." This struck me as extremely odd. Of course I was alive. Wasn't I flying in that damned Bleriot . . . ? I put a hand up to my face—and on to my face. But my hand did not stop there. It went on . . . it seemed to go in. And a pain shot through me as if all the knives in Harrods were being drawn across my mouth.

It was at this juncture that I made the remark—so I am told—which spread through the Flying Corps, and took me years to live down.

" Good God," I murmured, " am I disfigured ? "

And promptly hurtled back into unconsciousness for four and a half days.

Of my eight weary, and, at first, agonising months in hospital I will not speak. Except that I learned to bear pain like a little man, from a fellow in the bed opposite, whose face was burned almost to a cinder. It was my habit to scream when I heard the dressers approaching. . . . It is not too rollicking a sport to be " dressed " when one's face has practically been cut in two and one's mouth is round at the back of one's head. But the fellow opposite said one day " Hush. I'll swop my face for yours, young fellow," and cured me. He was never out of torture till he died. God rest him.

We are all afraid of death, I suppose. I know I was. But now I am not afraid. It is but a hurricane rush through the air, a view of green fields and tiny, red-roofed houses rushing to meet you. A gasping exhilaration. And a great calm.

I learned in one swift flight through space that it is not death we have to fear . . . but Life.

Those flying days were an almost monotonous repetition of deaths. Crashes and more deaths.

What grand fellows they were. A gallant company : most of them gone . . . young Ball, the V.C. who made a point of flying in his pyjamas whatever the weather. And Warneford, who won his V.C. by bringing down the first enemy Zeppelin over London . . . and tiny little Andrews, whose chest was too small to carry all the medal ribbons with which he was festooned. The Royal Flying Corps was small, but it was select. Select in the

best way, for its members were jealous of its good name, and they knew that they were pioneering in a Force which would some day—we did not realise how soon it was to be—take pre-eminent place.

A famous pilot, a red-headed dare-devil who cared little for his own freckled skin, typified for all time the spirit of the flying men of those days.

He was trying out a machine in France and crashed in a tree. Perched twixt heaven and earth, the boy sat blithely on top of the world.

A car came rushing up. Out of it tumbled an irate General. Walking up to the tree and brandishing his stick in the air, he stormed "Good God, you young fool. Had an accident?"

To which the red-haired one in his stammer, which was as famous as his red hair, made answer: "Why. No. No, . . .sir . . . I . . . er . . . always—er—land like this."

Milestones . . . milestones . . . I retrace my steps and meet once more all this gay, chivalrous company, and I feel proud that for a while I made one of them. Laughing cavaliers—laughing to the end.

There is nothing particularly gay or chivalrous in falling a thousand feet in an aeroplane. Any fool could do it.

But this fool lived to see another day.

Which was indeed foolish of him.

## CHAPTER THREE

TWENTY years after.

Dumas, I seem to recall, wrote a book of adventures and tales of daring-do with those three words as his title. His theme dealt with nice, clean little heroisms and killings . . . when swords were used as only true blue gentlemen could use swords. Although death could come upon you on the earth you were perfectly safe from destruction so long as you remained indoors and refrained from insulting your neighbour or provoking him to mortal combat by casting aspersions upon the supposed virtue of his wife.

But " Twenty Years After " casts back my mind to scenes such as Dumas never dreamed on . . . and he after all had a lively imagination upon which to draw. I have only facts . . . but cold, hard facts . . . facts which came raining down from the sky and terrorised some millions of harmless citizens. . . . Night after night . . . day after day . . . no one was safe . . . and the safety of London, indeed England, lay in the hands of a tiny body of men cooped up in a stuffy room in the Horse Guards. Under the command of one man.

Picture, if you can trouble to do so, a starless night in June . . . for one starless night will do as well as another. The heavens were pouring death over London. No living soul was abroad in the

streets . . . and the night was heavy with the roar of airship and aeroplane engines, and bombs whistled and screamed their way to earth.

Gentlemen in England now abed . . . and their ladies too for that matter, little know what they have escaped. Which is one of the reasons why it has taken the warnings of public spirited men, given a champion lead by Lord Rothermere, to make the Government seriously put the National Air hangar in order.

It is to me incredible that men of such proved common sense should have had to fight . . . against not only obstinate opposition, but incessant ridicule . . . to bring home to our politicians that our Air Force must be kept up to adequate and reasonable strength . . . so that never again will the terror by air come into the homes of our people, bringing swift, and often uncommonly painful death, to the helpless and the unarmed.

Towards the middle of 1917 I was engaged on what was prettily called " light duty " at Adastral House on the Victoria Embankment. A succession of medical boards had come to the conclusion that my nerves were all to hell . . . a not inaccurate estimate of my condition. Owing to my air crash it was deemed to be safer for the nation were I not to return to France as an airman. Such was the edict.

So I kicked my young and tingling heels doing deadly dull routine work at the Royal Flying Corps Headquarters at Adastral House . . . I sat in a room with a young staff officer who, like myself,

had impinged heavily upon Mother Earth from a considerable height. He was a mild-mannered young officer . . . with a baby face, bright blue eyes and very little hair on his head. His name was Segrave. He gave no indication whatever to me that he would win international fame by exhibitions of cast-iron nerve at incredible speeds.

Henry Segrave was quiet and industrious . . . but he had that peculiar look in his eyes which I have always observed upon the faces of young men who die as young men. Many times together we strolled out for a breath of fresh air, or stood together in front of our immediate superior, Colonel Basil Foster, the actor . . . who has by now probably entirely forgotten that he was ever a soldier at all, let alone a Colonel with an office desk as massive as the Albert Memorial.

Heavens, but I was bored. I have seldom been so bored in my life, with the possible exception of the time when I went out after elephant in Central Africa and had to walk one hundred miles in blazing heat before the infernal animals would allow me to catch up with them.

The authorities would not let me fly any more. They would not allow me to go out to France to join my regiment. My speech was rather bad at that time, though for some years past I have talked much too much. The Medical Boards doubtless considered that it would be a pity were I to order my men to advance to the attack and be unable to get out the requisite command to fall back. Who shall blame them ?

I went into Segrave's office one day and said, "Listen, Henry, I don't particularly want to get killed, but can't I do something?" This was after an attractive young girl with a weak mouth had handed me a white feather at the Carlton Grill. She also handed one to my companion. As he had only two hours previously received the Victoria Cross at the hands of the King at Buckingham Palace, the gesture did not go too well. This information, which I imparted to her with withering calm, knocked the girl even sillier than she was normally. Most of the White-Feather girls should have been horsewhipped or raped.

"Don't fuss," said Henry, "we are all in the same boat; something will happen. Probably to-night."

And something did happen . . . this time at the Berkeley Hotel. The more expensive of our eating caravanseries have more than once proved to be the stage setting for the turning second acts of my life. This must mean something . . . something definitely Rabelesian, I expect. It usually does.

That evening, dining with a one-time Squadron-Commander of mine, I was introduced to a short, remarkably fit-looking officer, wearing gay ribbons and the uniform of a Major-General. What struck me about him particularly at our first meeting . . . for we were to know one another very well—was his Nothing-Escapes-Me look and a plain rimmed eye-glass which stuck like a limpet in his right eye.

I inquired of my companion who the unusual-looking General was . . . for generally speaking

about that period generals were, and looked, three a penny.

"That," he replied, "is Splash." This time I looked again with more interest. For the name of Splash, which hid the identity of Major-General E. B. Ashmore, was famous throughout France. It was famous among our troops in France for the amazing capabilities of its owner as an Artillery and Flying Commander, and for the fact that not only was Splash the most popular General . . . and one of the most able in our armies . . . but that he was able to drink any man, woman or child under the table . . . without a movement of his eyeglass.

The General came back to our table and addressed me. "What are you doing now?" he asked. I told him.

The steady eyes regarded me.

"These daylight Air Raids by the Germans over London," he snapped . . . he had a curiously staccato way of speaking . . . "getting the War Office down. Been commanding the Artillery of the 29th Division near Ypres . . . my dug-out been drenched with gas for the last month. Come to London . . . welcome change . . . Government decided to combine Air Defence at home under one commander . . . been sent over here to take charge . . . better than bloody gas attacks . . . want an A.D.C. . . . with flying experience . . . would you like the job . . . all right. I'll fix it."

I do not actually recall my immediate acceptance of this flattering proposal. But next day I was told to report to General Ashmore at the Horse Guards

Parade. Then began my year of being in the hub of every Air Raid that plagued London . . . and I came to regard the marvel of that little room at the Horse Guards.

I spent some of my days and most of my nights . . . to the accompaniment of falling bombs, dashing across a deserted London in fast cars, and never being able to go anywhere without being known as a kind of human Air Raid warner.

General Ashmore soon had London under his thumb. For a time he was like a king who only had to press a button to send every citizen scuttling home or into the shelter of the Undergrounds. In his little room were the brains, the eyes, the ears of the defenders of London. The London Aircraft Defence Area—L.A.D.A. for short. Pregnant initials.

Sometimes I was allowed by the Germans to take a night off, and I made a practice of going to the theatre, leaving my telephone number and the exact position of my stall at the office. Managers began to greet my arrival at their houses of entertainment with groans of anguish. Time after time towards the second half of the play an attendant would tap me on the arm.

" Enemy Aircraft over the coast, sir," he would hiss. " Report immediately to the Horse Guards."

Up I would get . . . and my rising would be the signal for extreme nerves amongst the audience. Theatre patrons would get to recognise me . . . and as soon as the attendant bird of ill omen approached my stall . . . and I grew so weary of

being summoned from theatres that I gave up going . . . half the audience would rise and go home in excessive haste.

I have probably ruined more plays in London than any other human being—off the stage. As I love the theatre dearly it was all the more unpleasant.

An Air Raid night. The General and his staff, the telephonists silent like Robots of ill-omen . . . summoned from all over London to their posts watching and waiting in what must have been the most remarkable room in the world. And I, standing at my General's elbow, resigned to everything that could happen.

Stretched right across the one side of the wall was a vast map of England marked in squares, each square an area plentifully numbered.

As the hostile aircraft approached from the coast the area of the boundaries they crossed were illuminated on the map . . . little malignant lights creeping, creeping closer and closer towards London.

Round the room were countless telephones, with expectant figures with headphones glued to their ears, in instant touch with every gun emplacement, every searchlight crew . . . every aerodrome near and round London up from the sea.

The General sat in a gallery overlooking the map, silent and alert. Almost every second messages were put in front of him. Every gun station, searchlight, aerodrome, balloon apron, emergency landing post, coastal and inland watching post, was

connected by telephone to a sub-control. These twenty-five sub-controls were connected to the little room at the Horse Guards . . . soundproof, bombproof. So they said.

The illuminated counters crossed the map. As they crossed we followed the course of all aircraft flying over the country. It was thrilling beyond belief. From the time when an observer in the country saw a machine over him to the time when the counter representing it appeared on the map, was about half a minute on the map in our little room.

Flicking a switch the General could talk to any commander in the area . . . at a flick this squadron would take the air . . . and this . . . and the whole time we would sit in dead silence . . . waiting the echo of the first bomb to burst over London.

Whoever it was had arranged the ventilation in that sinister room would not last long at his job in this present age of health and efficiency. Many of us took our coats off, except that round, placid, concentrated General of ours, sitting at his place . . . immaculately dressed as ever. No German who ever lived could dislodge that eyeglass. It was as a beacon of hope and calm shining in a world temporarily gone haywire.

The illuminated map showed us the hostile aeroplanes coming nearer and nearer . . . and messages coming thick and fast like tiny snowflakes were handed to the General. He glanced at them and nodded. Away with them. The atmosphere

grew more electric . . . for I describe after all what was only one of our typical nights at that time.

We all of us know that every one of the raiders paying their unwelcome call knew London backwards and were chosen pilots for these raids on England. Viscount Curzon tells the story that meeting one of the Zeppelin commanders after the Armistice, he described how he had been sent on a three months' course to study the topography of London.

He stayed in rooms in Vigo Street and prepared, with that diligence which characterises the remarkable German race, to pass his examination when he returned to the land of his birth.

This worthy was asked, as one teaser, the names of all the public houses along the Strand. He reeled off a long list with, as Lord Curzon dryly says, " remarkable accuracy." Never had a man pub-crawled to more purpose. He literally drank his way to promotion.

All this we realised as we waited . . . and suddenly messages came through that no fewer than five German airships were buzzing about overhead. It looked as if the enemy were determined to deal London a death-blow this time.

My part in this grim little play at the Horse Guards was small but vastly exciting. For it was I who had to pass the word to " Warn London."

Occasionally when I could see that this action was soon to become imminent, I used to dash upstairs to an office where volunteers were unconcernedly brewing hot coffee for those below, and

telephone to my family at our house in Chelsea. I only had to say one word for the Knox clan to know that soon they might be blown sky high, and that it were better did they retire to the cellar. This they never did, but got a curious sense of pride that through the agency of their clever little second son they knew that hostile aircraft was approaching London before any other member of the general public. And I put down the telephone with a fatuous sense of self-importance that the safety of our great city lay in my hands. Which of course it certainly did not.

This night my summons came. My General whispered to me "Warn London." I told the telephonist, and things began to move. All we did then was to press a button which communicated with Scotland Yard. And that seat of criminal investigation gave the order for the maroons to work. The War Cabinet, the Police, Special Constables, the Fire Brigades and the Hospitals were given the first intimation. Especially the hospitals.

The public were instructed that when the maroons sounded they had to take cover, that the streets had to empty, for unpleasant things might descend violently upon their heads. They were also told that when all was over the bugles would sound the "All Clear."

There was a delicious instance of one family who were woken up from a blameless sleep by the "All Clear" bugles and spent the rest of the night crouching in the cellar.

We are still in that little room. And the balloon is definitely up.

The General ordered that the searchlights of the London Defences were not to open . . . for the night was misty. It was well he gave the order, for at midnight the five airships passed through a small area thirty miles north-west of London, bound bang for the City. If the searchlights had been turned on and the German commanders had seen them through the mist, the Zeppelins would have let loose, taking with thanks the finest opportunity for smashing London they had ever been handed on a plate.

Bombs were dropping somewhere. We could hear them vaguely, for our room was not really soundproof and no one had ever believed it was bombproof.

A small, thick-set figure walked into the room, clad in the khaki of a Field Marshal. With his famous stock with the gold hunting pin neatly stuck into it and his chest blazing with medal ribbons, Lord French invaded the far from merry company. My General made as if to get up from his seat, for as Commander-in-Chief of the Home Forces, Lord French was technically in command.

The Field Marshal smiled and pushed Ashmore gently back into his place.

"No, you carry on, Ashmore," he said. "It's your job. I have come to look on. A pretty big raid, what?"

My General replied "Looks like it, sir," and bent again to his task.

Lord French gave me a smiling greeting. He was never stand-offish with young officers, and I have many happy memories—and, alas! one tragic, of my meeting with this great soldier. And then Ashmore beckoned to me.

"I've heard they have dropped a bomb on the Gaiety Theatre," he said. "Take the car and go and see." It did not sound very funny to me, but it got a laugh and even the Field Marshal twinkled. But I had my orders and much against my will I sailed forth to carry them out.

Our car was standing just inside the archway. I rushed out and called to our chauffeur: "Take me to the Gaiety. But for God's sake if you can do eighty miles an hour, do it." With a nod, for our charioteer was entirely imperturbable, we started. We took the corner into Whitehall at a most unpleasant speed, and raced towards the Strand. The streets were utterly deserted. Bang. Bang. Crash . . . was all we heard. And the zoom of mighty engines in the sky. I had London all to myself and I never wanted any privilege less.

We tore down the Strand and reached the Gaiety . . . the only gaiety thing in the land at that moment. With a screech of brakes the car stopped and I raced across to take a look. Nothing at all. That home of merriment looked bored, but untouched. I turned round and suddenly felt a sear in my left leg as if a red-hot iron had been drawn across it. It was a splinter from a bomb—or one of our own "Archies."

Back we raced, and I limped into the little room at the Horse Guards.

" Well ? " said the General.

" Gaiety all present and correct, sir. More than I am," and I made for my sentinel post. Upon which everyone laughed once more. But my leg did hurt like blazes for a minute or two . . . nothing to laugh at.

That night the ships of the air hurled bombs at Hendon, Cricklewood, and at Camberwell and Lewisham, and made a devil of a hole outside Swan and Edgar's in Piccadilly. They killed thirty-four people and wounded fifty-nine. Owing to the searchlights being switched off, the raiders did not know they were over London. So we heard afterwards. Just a big town they thought—give it hell.

Some hours afterwards the raid was over. The " All Clear " was sounded. We packed up and I drove home with my General in his car. And that was that. It would be the same the next night for all we knew. A weary business.

The Germans were unsporting enough to pick a Whit Monday for their biggest and best air " hate." Most of the population were comfortably abed when on May 19th, 1918, thirteen German Gothas broke through our Air Defence lines . . . and in spite of slow machines . . . fast for those days . . . and unreliable engines, dropped seventy-two bombs in the L.C.C. area. Not by accident.

The historian tells us truly . . . and perhaps unlike the historian, I was there . . . that they killed forty-eight peaceful citizens, wounded one hundred and sixty-six others, and either damaged or blew to blazes the tidy sum of more than one

thousand dwellings and offices within a six miles' radius of Charing Cross.

We at the Horse Guards were little men who had a busy night. The enemy pilots damaged property valued at £130,733 that night. That same night one hundred and twenty-six gun stations fired forty thousand rounds, and eighty-four R.A.F. machines were sent up to tackle the raiders.

Our venomous visitors did not get off scot-free, as three of their aeroplanes were brought down by our anti-aircraft guns and three more by close-in fighting.

As unfortunately so often happened, the screeching missiles fell on friend and foe alike. Our anti-aircraft bombardment killed one civilian, wounded eight more, and did great damage to several hundred houses.

But a fine victory was claimed by us, and deserved. And for a welcome change not one of the newspapers demanded the next morning "What WERE the anti-air defenders of London doing?" They were doing . . . as they always had been doing . . . their best.

To some purpose.

Like most serious things in this life, all these alarums had their funny side. Our Continental cousins never could fathom our National sense of humour. And never will.

When General Ashmore took over, at that time the General Commanding London District was the redoubtable Sir Francis Lloyd. He was looked on as a regular terror, and was certainly the Prince of

Martinets. He ruled his command with a rod of iron, and there was not one officer in the Brigade of Guards who was not afraid of him. If any delinquent had the choice of coming up before Frankie Lloyd in the morning or going over the top at dawn, the top would win—tops down.

Frankie Lloyd was a great figure and I doubt whether we shall ever look on his like again. He always appeared as if he had been poured into his uniform. It fitted him skin tight. His riding boots were as polished as a diplomat's manners, and his waist was reputed—justly—to be the smallest in the British Army. He wore high shoes with red heels, and his left wrist jangled with gold bracelets. A very devil of a fellow.

It was impossible, seeing him casually, to realise that this gallant man, as indeed he was, had been almost cut in half by bullets in the South African War. He was never out of pain, and under that superbly cut tunic were steel fastenings that literally held his body together. To some people Frankie Lloyd was a bit of a joke. But to no one who had ever served under him.

On our list at the Horse Guards were the names of important officers, Cabinet Ministers and so forth who must be warned of any raid before the official warning went forth. For some reason the name of General Sir Francis Lloyd was not on this list, and the omission made him extremely angry. I never did think that he cared over much for my General, for he did not like to see anyone of any lower rank in supreme command in moments of

crises, especially on his own front porch of the London District.

So Sir Francis Lloyd complained to the War Minister. The War Minister complained to Lord French, and the Field Marshal told the General and the General told the subaltern—myself. In future Sir Francis had to be on the warning list. The reason was obscure, for he had no part whatever in the direction of Air Raid Defences, and Ashmore reigned supreme in that sinister little room. No one could uncrown a king of London—a king for the nonce.

At times all of us would be summoned hastily to the Horse Guards, usually in the middle of the night for an imminent raid. But often these raids were false alarms and we could soon all go back to beds and snatch the sleep which we all needed so badly.

Early one morning . . . two o'clock it was and bitterly cold . . . the summons came. Soon we were all at our posts. But we were pretty sure that this was another false alarm, and we decided not to drag the War Cabinet and the necessary and unnecessary Generals from the bosoms of their wives. For Generals—in War time—are ever above suspicion.

But I remembered " Frankie," as he was always known—well behind his back. He wanted to be warned and he jolly well should be warned. So risking a trial by Court Martial, I rang up the abode of the distinguished soldier. A grave, reverend voice answered me . . . the voice of a

livid butler summoned from his couch. Livid—but under full control.

"Tell the General," I said, "that we have had warning of the approach of hostile aircraft. If he is asleep, wake him up. Those are his strict instructions."

Hostile aircraft had been sighted. That was no more, no less, than the truth. But they were making tracks for home, having no taste for risking their lives and just dropping a bomb or two in the sea, just to make sure of their Iron Crosses. Discretion was sometimes the better part of their valour. But not often—they were gallant warriors.

Decision was reached that there would be no raid to-night. Exactly an hour and a half after I had telephoned General Lloyd we made preparations to go home. The air was gay with badinage, and even my chief cracked a gag. No danger to-night, boys . . . was the cry. And then to the amazement of everyone, except myself, the door opened and in walked Sir Francis Lloyd. Immaculate as ever, beyond human expression.

Every hair in that famous moustache in trim . . . the waist a marvel of tight belting . . . it had taken him more than an hour to dress. It always did.

He was very business-like. "Are the raiders over us?" he asked.

My chief, taken aback for the first time in his life, replied that the alarm was false . . . that the General should never have been warned. A mistake . . . so sorry . . . his presence all the same was much appreciated.

Sir Francis stared and I feared an explosion. Then turning, he barked "No mistake at all. Quite right to warn me all the same. Good-night." And he stalked out of the room.

No one ever knew who had dared drag the frightening General Officer out of his warm bed on a false alarm. Till to-day. It was naughty of me, I suppose, but I was very young. But it never had been officially necessary to warn Frankie, and I did not see why he should put us to a lot of trouble for nothing. There was enough to do on an air raid night without having the Headquarters of England's defences—such a little room too—packed with grand generals with superiority complexes.

But he was an unexpected fellow, was Frankie. Funny thing, he was never accustomed to take the least notice of me when we met in the passage of the Horse Guards. I was only a subaltern to him, even if I did wear red tabs. But after this episode, which will be remembered by some people with a sigh for other days, he never failed to smile at me and give me greeting. I wonder if he knew. Maybe he guessed. A fine fellow, I repeat, and a personality.

The habit of attacking London became almost monotonous. Our squadrons did what they could, and the gallantry of the officers of the Home Defence Squadrons has yet properly to be honoured. Some new scheme had to be thought of. And it was.

General Ashmore drew up a plan for a balloon apron barrage to be erected just outside London and inside the aeroplane patrol lines. General

Smuts, who was then the special adviser of the War Cabinet on Air Defence, approved the idea, and so did Lord French.

The plan was for an apron of balloons, joined horizontally, with heavily weighted wire streamers hanging from the cross cable at suitable intervals. Enemy aircraft, especially at night, could not see this dreadful obstacle in its path, for it mattered not how high or how low they flew. The Germans must have thought it as rotten an idea as the War Cabinet thought it admirable.

The trials were made in September, 1917, in Richmond Park. It was a pleasant day, but the wind was keen. General Ashmore travelled down with Lord French in his car and I sat in front.

We walked across to where the balloons were linked together . . . each balloon being held down by a score of aircraftsmen. Puny little figures they looked, like ants clinging to the carcase of some vast monster. I shivered . . . for the wind was blowing steadily now and it was cold. Then came a yell from a hundred throats. We looked up.

One of the balloons had broken loose. Up it soared, taking the other balloons with it . . . and the razor-edged streamers dangled and swished above our heads. Two of the aircraftsmen had held on to their ropes just a fatal fraction of a second too long, and up they went, with the balloons . . . clinging. We saw them look down, but it was too late. They were up at a hundred feet before they could decide to jump. Up and up

they went and then, with a scream, one of the men let go his hold.

Down he tore, head over heels, screaming as he fell. We were all held motionless with horror. He crashed with a ghastly thud ten yards from where I stood—bumped and rebounded, and fell—to stillness—split literally in half.

The wires of the balloons screamed. We were in an open field, but there was one tree which might shelter us. Any one of the trailing wires travelling, as they were, close to the ground at vast speed, would have cut us in half. I shall never forget that dash to the sanctuary.

We reached the haven . . . crouching together for safety, but only just in time. The dangling, yelling wires swished over the grass towards us. They rose as if possessed by the devil and cut through the branches of the tree like paper, and on they went soaring higher and higher. Almost out of sight were the balloons, and still hanging on to one of them was a tiny speck of khaki . . . the other aircraftsman who had not . . . yet—let go.

He fell half an hour later, this poor chap. He had climbed somehow into the rigging, and crashed from three thousand feet over Croydon. His strength gave out.

Lord French, who, when Commander-in-Chief of our Expeditionary Force, had been bound perforce to send men in hundreds to their fate and had seen death in most of its forms, was white as a sheet. So was my General. As for myself I found I was trembling.

The Field Marshal strode back to his car. Not a word was said. By him—by any of us. We drove to London in silence. And the wind fell to a breath and the sun came out, but I doubt whether we really noticed it. The memory of those two men haunted us. It haunts me still.

The balloon barrage came into force and scared the Germans badly. Their pilots began to loathe being sent on raids to England. No wonder.

Later when raids were few, Sir Henry Wilson, who was then Chief of Staff, and incidentally one of the most fascinating human beings I have ever met, suggested doing away with the balloon aprons at a War Cabinet Meeting. General Ashmore protested. And the Cabinet decided in his favour.

After the War, General Ashmore, to whom our country owes more than it will ever be allowed to realise, tried to establish a small claim on account of his apron scheme before the Rewards Commission. Others had done so—for less. Mr. Justice Sargeant decided against him. This very scheme —though on a large scale—has now been "adopted" by the Air Ministry : twenty years after. Which is the way of life.

These days when vast sums are being spent on Air Defence and our Income Tax goes up by leaps and bounds, it is amusing, and maybe a little bitter, to recall that early in the War—I have General Ashmore's record for this . . . the Government had undertaken insurance of property against air raid risks.

The Lord Mayor, heading an impressive deputation, tackled the Prime Minister, suggesting that universal indemnity, with retrospective effect, should be substituted for insurance.

The Cabinet, who were not a Cabinet for nothing, laughed hollowly and sent the Lord Mayor, complete with impressive deputation, away with shouts of " Nothing doing, boys " in their ears.

For Air Raid Insurance the Government charged one-sixth per cent. And made a profit of £10,898,205.

There is something almost Barriesque in this reflection—so " whimsy " is it.

The nation is taking air raids more seriously now. Or rather, the prospect of them. Hopeful citizens are submitting to gas mask drill with a ready grace : till they grow tired of a new game. Some of the younger generation look on it all as rather a joke and, decidedly, as a bore.

Their reaction is that if we are bombed, we are bombed . . . and no air raid precaution drill is going to make the least difference. They are wrong, of course. We who know better than they . . . for air raids are unpleasant things and death from the sky is a messy and undignified exit from life—know that they are foolish in this attitude. But they typify, maybe, the peculiar spirit of our race. And it is not such a bad spirit, perhaps, in the end. We have never yet taken easily to doing the things we ought to do—if those things tend to create a fuss and fill us with boredom mixed with self-consciousness.

We shall be ready when the time comes. We usually are. Somehow.

During the War two old ladies, living together, were warned that a raid from the air was upon them. They were adjured to go and hide in the basement for a while.

The two old ladies drew themselves up, simultaneously, to their full height.

" Certainly not," they replied, " we have every confidence in the policeman at the gate."

Not the way, it will be agreed, to behave . . . but certainly magnificent.

It is the fashion among some of our countrymen —those with greasy skins, pseudo Chelsea leanings and inverted habits—to run their country down. They wave little pink flags and drink damnation to England's prestige in diluted little pink gins, and work off their nasty inhibitions by sleeping with other men's wives, husbands, sisters and brothers in entirely indiscriminate order.

But to blazes with the lot of them. It is very meet and right to have every confidence in the policeman at the gate. He has stood at his post down through the ages . . . immovable, sturdy, reliable.

The policeman will still be standing at his post long after we who love our tantalising country, together with all the greasy-skinned blemishes, will have passed to our allotted destiny.

The terror that flies by night . . . and by day— must never come again to our shores—to kill—to maim our own people, and to see our children

brought up as nervous wrecks. Many now amongst us came into this world to the accompaniment of bombs from on high, under the blazing Heavens —with Fear as midwife in chief.

Such agonies must not come to pass again. They shall not so come to pass.

We are in the main a sensible lot of individuals. And very, very unexpected.

## CHAPTER FOUR

AND so, not to bed, but to India.

Vast numbers of our countrymen are apt to take the thought of this considerable possession of ours in their mental stride. The strides are short and somewhat languid. To the average stay-at-home British man and woman, India reveals itself as a very large, unpleasantly hot part of the world which, coloured red on the map, supplies a devastating number of arid jokes mainly about a seemingly laughable place called Poona.

Men and women of our race home on leave from India are invariably divided into two categories. The men are supposed to be sunburned, to be lean and lank, excessively choleric of temper, to talk most of the day about "punka wallahs" and "tiffin" and to be endued with a passion for curry and beating natives like gongs. The women quite erroneously believed to be yellow of complexion, acid in disposition, and of a hundred per cent. scandal power. In short, to be jokes and not to be taken in any way seriously.

It was fashionable in the days of which I tell . . . and maybe still is . . . to introduce one's cousin "home from India, you know" as if he were not too nice to know. Those glamorous shores were regarded rather as one of those suburbs you motor through with your eyes shut . . . full of black men

and gorgeously turbaned rajahs with too much money and a disgusting array of wives.

The thought of India had always fascinated me, for even at the early age of not quite twenty-one, I was thrilled to re-read the history of that dim country and ponder deeply on the wondrous tales of courage and endeavour with which my fellow-countrymen, labouring silently and afar, had added so lustrous a jewel to our National crown. It seemed to me to be a place where men got things done with pleasantly little fuss . . . and no banging of big drums.

It was nearly the end of the War. My brother killed . . . my father stricken with a broken heart, I began to grow tired to nausea of doing little at home except going daily to the Horse Guards complete with red tabs and shining spurs, and standing around four nights a week while the Air Raiding season was at its gory height.

Besides, London at that time had taken on a curious, spurious gaiety. The gaiety of a people who had supped so full of horrors for so many years that they now cared little what happened. Many of my friends had cast what morals they had ever had to the winds and there were parties night after night where revellers tried to forget the daily casualty lists and the growing conviction that we were caught up in a madness which would never cease.

I was young and not, I was given to understand, unelegible. Hostesses showered invitations upon me. Flattered, I accepted and night after night I was out meeting a few decent people and a great

many worthless ones. I never had any sleep to speak of. My father regarded my behaviour with growing concern. He considered that I ought not to be dashing around day after day, night after night, and never understood that I only did so because I was bored to extinction. Because I longed to be allowed to get back to France even if it was only driving a lorry. Because I was fed up with my job, fed up with the rotten people I was meeting. I did not seem to be getting anywhere and each day I would see in the list of killed or missing the name of another pal of mine, and I could have screamed at my ineffectiveness.

The final touch was at last put on my mental weariness. I had been out at a party. God knows what happened at the party for it was something more than disreputable . . . one of a bunch which went on at that period. But I always have had the knack of steering clear of any personal delvings into the mire, partly because any sort of indiscriminate sexuality bores me and partly because I was always reserved and shy. The orgy broke up at five o'clock in the morning and one of the guests in particular was paralytically drunk. This worthy was a General commanding a division in France, and was now home on leave. He could not be allowed to go home alone. I was deputed to take him to his abode. Probably because I was sober. The only one.

The officer in question was arrayed in full General's khaki uniform with badges of rank and medal ribbons, and for half an hour I dragged him

along the pavement. No taxi could be found. Once or twice my burden fell down. I honked him to his feet and on we went, with fury in my heart and shame filling my soul. A taxi came at last. In he stumbled and collapsed on the floor. At half-past six I had undressed the besotted warrior, put him to bed and made my way home. I could not sleep. I felt furious that I should be subjected to such indignities, and I knew my father had heard me come in. More misunderstandings.

The next day I arrived at the Horse Guards' office half an hour late . . . and my superior officer wanted to know " what the hell I was late for." I told him. I added that I had been forced to drag a divisional general blind drunk along Chelsea High Street at five o'clock in the morning . . . that I was sick to death of the drink and vice in which everyone tried to force me to join. . . . How dare he ask me why I was half an hour late? For my part he could go to hell. . . . I was going somehow to France, or anywhere, out of London.

To his credit my astonished chief said nothing. He could see I was on the verge of a breakdown. But from that moment I knew that soon my general would have to dispense with my services. Something else must happen. Somehow.

Life, as my readers will agree, is a chancy business. Just when it has knocked you down it gently picks you up again and points out to your dazed gaze a new signpost. One which your fuddled eyes had not seen before. If you are wise you follow this new way, trusting it may lead you

where you will be happy and allowed to fulfil yourself. If you are wise.

A delightful member of the Headquarters staff was one Cyril Hankey, a man rich in experience of life and a fine soldier. We had liked one another from the first. It was Colonel Hankey who was to point out my new signpost to me. He never entirely approved of me, I think, but had the sense to see that I was headstrong and foolish and that I needed no more but a gentle shove in the right direction to go—in the right direction.

" Sir George Lloyd, just appointed Governor of Bombay, is looking for an A.D.C.," he said to me. " I've given him your name. Go and see him."

It was my twenty-first birthday. An omen undoubtedly.

Thus did I come to meet one of the most remarkable men who has come my way. A man who from the moment I met him commanded my loyalty and affection which he still has to this day. I am proud to feel that it was so fated that I should come to know him well for many years and to accompany him on his first real step to the brilliant pro-consular career which was to be his fate.

With the blessings of my family, I arrayed myself in my blue " undress " uniform one night and repaired, extremely apprehensively, to the house in Wilton Place where dwelt Sir George, now Lord Lloyd, and Lady Lloyd.

I was ushered upstairs into a room which lay in darkness save for the light of a fire and a reading lamp. Books were ranged round the room

. . . hundreds and hundreds of books. I blinked, and came to my senses, hearing a curiously harsh voice saying, " Good evening. Come and sit down."

I advanced and saw a slight figure lying back in an armchair . . . a man with a darkish complexion, a small black moustache and remarkably alight eyes. His build was slender and lithe. He addressed me in bursts of sentences rather as if a machine-gun were having a friendly chat. In all these years Lord Lloyd has never changed, either in his dynamic energy, his markedly youthful appearance or in figure.

For some reason I was highly nervous. I wanted the job before I had rung the front door bell. Now I had glimpsed the man I wanted it still more, for I sensed, as one does sense these things, that here was a person who had the knack of winning service and loyalty.

I sat down on the edge of a chair and felt, and looked, like a schoolboy. Now was the time for me to talk fast and authoritatively, to show this Governor fellow that before him was sitting the very acme of all aides-de-camp. So much did I want to talk that, of course, my stammer, as always on any urgent occasion, took me by the throat. Miserably I fought for words. It was hopeless, I felt. Whatever an A.D.C. might have to do, he must be able to talk. What would be the use of telling this stern-looking interrogator afterwards that this accursed war legacy of mine only came on when I was jittery with nerves? That it would pass in a moment?

ON THE STAFF OF LORD LLOYD WHEN GOVERNOR OF BOMBAY, INDIA.

[*To face p. 74.*

Wretched I felt, and wretched I must have looked. And Lord Lloyd realised my plight. A man of extraordinary sensitiveness himself . . . a sensitiveness he hid behind a seemingly aggressive manner—he invariably jumped to your conclusion before you had begun to crouch for the spring.

So he talked to me, asked me about myself, told me about his new job . . . how proud he was to have been selected so young . . . . he was only thirty-nine . . . and how keen he was to have the smartest staff in India. He was allowed six A.D.Cs. . . . only one remained to be chosen. Gradually I relaxed and found my tongue. I found I could make him laugh. I was always able to make him laugh . . . in an affectionate, fatherly way. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why we got on so well. He was liable to frighten people. He never frightened me after that first awful ten minutes of our first meeting.

The door opened and in came his wife. " Meet my youngest A.D.C., Blanche," he said. " He will be coming out with us."

Lady Lloyd looked at me and remarked, " He only looks about sixteen, George," then smiled and held out her hand. Thus was my immediate future fixed.

There are many people, I believe, who dislike Lord Lloyd. They say that he is impatient, overbearing, dictatorial, tactless and apt to ride with flying hooves over any mortal who bars the way to his ambition. These people are usually fools. Lord Lloyd never has wasted a moment on a fool.

Anyone with whom he comes in contact who cannot almost anticipate his mind and mood, who cannot keep pace with his lightest mental process, he consigns to the devil. But for the man who jumps to it mentally and physically, and is prepared to work as feverishly as he himself, this man is a chief in a million. He becomes, never patient perhaps, but inspiring, considerate and understanding.

To his wife Lord Lloyd owes a vast debt. A debt he will acknowledge gladly and unashamedly. As Blanche Lascelles she was Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Alexandra, and a personage herself. She is tall, with a strikingly gracious deportment, and imbued with a natural dignity which never forsook her. I doubt whether any Governor's wife has as regally held her position or by her example and precept contributed more to her husband's prestige as did Lady Lloyd, except, possibly, Lady Allenby.

Shortly after the Armistice was signed we sailed for India, I gay at heart and with eighteen new suits in my luggage, which my father had paid for without a word of parental protest. The Eastern adventure had begun.

We left Victoria in a blaze of glory. Lord Lloyd and Lady Lloyd, Con Benson, Alan (Tommy) Lascelles, Lady Lloyd's brother, and myself as A.D.Cs. . . . the others were already in Bombay . . . and David, the Lloyd's eight-year-old son, a dream of beauty, but a trifle spoiled. The Governor's butler . . . an immensely dignified creature with a habit of wheezing like a rhinoceros, and a personal maid made up the entourage.

Lord Lloyd has ever had things done just a little better and in more unusual fashion than the next man. Instead of travelling by one of the big P. and O. ships, his friend Lord Inchcape arranged that one of the smaller British-India boats should have the pleasure of transporting us. Special suites were constructed and half the ship was roped off for us. One journey east is like another journey east . . . that much maligned Bay of Biscay . . . the dolphins turning head over heels in the blue water . . . a great deal of conversation and much too much to eat.

All went well, till I, the baby of this august party . . . fell ill. It was the time of the terrible outbreak of flu' which accounted in India alone for hundreds of thousands of lives. I took to my bed and wilted visibly a day and a half before we were due in Port Said. It was obvious that I would have to be landed at Port Said and left behind. Obvious to everyone on board except Lord Lloyd.

This story which I begin to recount will no doubt cause acute amazement to all who still regard Lord Lloyd as a conceited and proud tyrant. He cabled to a famous doctor he knew was in Cairo to come down to Port Said at once and meet our ship. He himself turned out of his specially built Governor's suite and, to the horror of my fellow A.D.Cs., had me transferred thereto, taking my humble cabin himself. And he cabled to Lord Inchcape in London practically ordering him to hold up the boat at Port Said for two days.

What Lord Inchcape, a bit of a tartar himself, thought when he got the cable rests uneasily in the

womb of mystery. Our ship was carrying His Majesty's mails, and nothing short of an explosion at sea would dare to delay them. There were some hundreds of passengers on board bound for Port Said, Suez, Aden and Bombay. Our arrival at Bombay had been timed to the day, the hour, the split second. For weeks harassed officials in Bombay had been arranging for the seating accommodation at the Apollo Bundar . . . the landing stage to bear the weight of more than a thousand high officials, eminent soldiers and ruling Princes. British and Indian troops had been drafted into the capital prepared to line the streets for four miles up to Government House. The streets were to finish their decorations by a certain day . . . speeches of welcome had been prepared and the retiring Governor, Lord Willingdon, to say nothing—if one could ever say nothing of such a terrific character—of his famous wife, were there bang to schedule.

Lord Lloyd was duly apprised of all this as we made for Port Said at increased speed. By this time I was dangerously ill. He was told that not only had a ship owned by the P. and O. Line never been delayed for anyone, but that it was unthinkable to hurl the entire arrangements of the Bombay Presidency into chaos for any sick passenger . . . let alone a mere A.D.C.

To all this my Chief turned a deaf ear and merely repeated at intervals . . . in that terrifying snarl of his, that he was damned if he was going to allow any member of his staff to die on his hands and that, roughly, the P. and O. Steamship Company,

the India Office and the Bombay Administration could accommodatingly go to hell.

We docked at Port Said. Lord Lloyd came into my cabin . . . his cabin . . . with a laconic telegram from Lord Inchcape giving permission for the ship to be held up at his discretion. A stretcher was brought in. I was placed upon it, and to the accompaniment of the cheers of the passengers, whose arrangements and time-tables had been so unceremoniously thrown overboard, I was lowered over the side into the largest launch in the harbour.

For two days I lay in hospital in Port Said, while the liner waited . . . an object of awestruck attention. The fever abated. I could with safety be moved. An enormous motor-car called for me. There was the ship, and lining the decks all the passengers. As I was carried up the gangway they again gave hearty cheers. . . . My Chief greeted me. He and Lady Lloyd had called at the hospital each day. And the liner was graciously allowed to proceed on its way. She gave an outraged hoot . . . and nosed into Bombay harbour—two days late.

If Lord and Lady Willingdon, the ruling Princes, the Generals Commanding Troops, the Members of the Bombay Council and all the six hundred British and Indian troops lining our route complained at this unparalleled delay, it was not brought to my ears. They all probably took one look at Lord Lloyd and their complaints died on their lips. He affected people that way. Even Secretaries of State.

I know no man I have ever met . . . and in my peculiar and varied life I have met all sorts and conditions of men . . . who would have done this wonderful thing . . . for the youngest member of his staff—who would have risked a stiff reprimand from the India Office at the outset of his Governorship. When anyone speaks slightingly in my presence of Lord Lloyd there comes into my eyes, which are older than they were, an expression of such pent-up fury that the conversation is switched hastily to the weather.

I have never forgotten. I never shall forget . . . and I record this little history to show what manner of man this was. And what manner of man this still is, in spite of all the jealousies and spites which even now rage against him, and the sneering enemies who encompass him round about.

Government House, Bombay, is not a house at all. It is a succession of buildings of inconceivable ugliness ranged along the farthest point of the coast at Malabar Hill. The great Banqueting Hall was assuredly designed by some mortal in a fit of delirium tremens. There was the main building for the Governor and his wife and household . . . the A.D.Cs.' bungalows, the distinguished guests' bungalows, offices, and long rambling stables and tennis courts and vast gardens, gay with what flowers could remain gay in so stifling a climate.

In the first two weeks of our residence we entertained eighteen hundred people to lunch and dinner, five thousand to garden parties, and three thousand to a State Ball. And heaven knows how many

thousands of people wrote their names in the Visitors' Books. There were the visits of Rajahs, and the poignant occasion when His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad, the richest man in the world, would gladly have ordered my head to be chopped off.

This Potentate came down to Bombay to pay his state call on the new Governor with three special trains . . . one for himself and his personal staff, one for his servants and the other for his wives and ladies im-permanently-in-waiting. The Nizam drove up to Government House in a Rolls-Royce the size of St. Paul's, and there, waiting for him were all six of us A.D.Cs., resplendent in a blue and red uniform with gold aguellettes. And a little behind us stood Lord and Lady Lloyd.

The Nizam shook hands with the Governor and his Lady, and then Colonel "Jungly" Greig, Lloyd's Military Secretary, presented the staff to this bejewelled little man. He started with me, being the youngest. The Nizam with a shrug held out his right hand. He had replaced his glove on it. I made no move, but stared fixedly at the hand. For an Indian, no matter what his rank, to shake hands with an Englishman while wearing gloves is not done in moments of high ceremony.

There was an awful silence. I glanced at Lord Lloyd. My look was intercepted. Then the Nizam whipped off his glove and his hand met mine. He smiled at my insistence. He had obviously not counted on it.

The job of being A.D.C. to any Governor is

particularly arduous, but to an Indian Governor more so than ever. It is commonly supposed that A.D.Cs.' posts are given to younger sons whose lack of brains and *nous* unfits them for any intelligent occupation. The supposition is not only common but half-witted.

Upon his staff depends, in large measure, the success of a Governor. In their hands rests his reputation. They are never off duty. They have no set working hours. The Book of the Order of Precedence, which in our Presidencies, Dependencies and Colonies, takes precedence of the Bible itself, has to be studied and mastered. Every human being is numbered like a convict. Woe betide the prestige of a Governor if at a dinner party the wife of the local Bishop is put two places lower down the table than the wife of the local Brigadier-General. Such a mistake is never forgiven. Wars have been begun for less. I do not unduly exaggerate.

The A.D.Cs. send out invitations to a banquet. Ranged round the room are two hundred and fifty guests. Soldiers, sailors, officials, visiting notabilities and their wives, Maharajahs, Rajahs, Nawabs, down to the least in rank of the ruling class of India. None of these faces are known to the staff of the Governor . . . to their tired eyes they are a blur. Somehow the faces are arranged in order . . . according to the sacred Book of Precedence. The band strikes up, and the Governor and his Lady appear.

The A.D.C. whose night it is to be tortured precedes them. He calls out the name of every

guest . . . and rank and title. Some of the names of the Indians sound like exploding soda-bottle syphons, but the A.D.C. must make no mistake.

Our senior A.D.C., a wiry being called Macewan, a nervous, capable little person, never once made a mistake in four years. His memory was prodigious. He was terrifyingly right.

After the banquet their Excellencies repair to high thrones and the staff bring up guests for a chat . . . the women to the Governor, the men to the Governor's wife.

It became an agony to remember who had been marched up to the presences and who had not. We " bringers-up " retired into a corner and waited to catch the eye of the throned ones, ready for the signal to collect another victim. In time we got to know who were the bores, the pretentious, the fatuous visitors, and we delivered our Chief out of their thrall as soon as possible. There was one appalling snob whom I would never leave with Lady Lloyd for more than half a minute. I dragged up a newcomer and he, perforce, had to bow and retire. He hated me like hell.

For years past Lady Lloyd has regaled dinner parties with a story of how I brought up one woman to her no fewer than five times in one evening and how she nearly went mad trying to find new subjects of conversation. But, of course, it is only a very good story.

The snobbery and back-biting, the petty jealousies and scandal-mongering among people " Out East " is beyond all human powers of description.

So long as you "go in" before your immediate social inferior it does not matter if you commit fornication after every meal. Fear of eternal damnation is as nothing to fear of being incorrectly announced at a social function. You can be mean, vicious, purse-proud and cruel, and no one cares greatly. But so long as you keep the latest arrivals in their place and make their lives a purgatory with your gossip and petty tyrannies, you are "all right." I found the same in Africa, in Egypt, in the Sudan . . . this nauseating patronage by vulgarians *en masse*.

A Governor's A.D.C. is exposed to every sort of temptation. Invitations are showered upon him so that the "inviters" shall be sure of being on the Governor's House list. The better-looking ones can take their pick of the company of most of the pretty girls who, in instances I recall, were strangely unmoral and unashamed. Nothing matters so long as you are in the swim and the people who can make or mar you socially are on the staff of the Governor.

One day a Rajah sent up to my bungalow at Government House a shining new Rolls-Royce. A present for me. In a parcel was a pearl which must have been worth at least two hundred pounds. They were sent back of course.

I have a great admiration for the Parsee of India. He is an astute man, well-bred, and a man of substance and honour. The Parsee is the merchant of India and swims in laks of rupees. Men such as Sir Dorab Tata, the Jeehejeboys, the Sassoons and

the other great merchant families are ornaments to their country.

"Jungly Greig," the Military Secretary was, and remains, a strange phenomenon. For twenty years he had been Military Secretary to Governors of Bombay. His friends used to call him "Forever with the Lord," and he was a veritable walking encyclopædia on India, its customs, its people and its ways. He was a famous cricketer . . . as the county of Hampshire will testify . . . and was unbeatable at lawn tennis. A tiny little man, with a soft little voice—so soft that one had to bend low in order to hear what he said. I could never make him out. But the name is known from one end of India to the other . . . and in his head rest secrets which might unmake Governments—and certainly unmake Governors.

A year or two ago Colonel Grieg came home from India and became a Roman Catholic monk. An enigma to the end.

The heat of Bombay was terrific. Dry heat I can stand, but the clammy, wet heat of Bombay is beyond all words. The interminable functions and parades necessitated constant changing out of and into hot uniforms. At night, preparatory to dressing for another bout of duty, it was impossible to keep even reasonably cool. Often I would change my collar six times in an evening. In bed it was no use having sheets or any nonsense of that kind. To lie on top of the bed with five fans playing on the body was the only way to get any sleep, and an almost certain way of catching pneumonia.

Then came the next day . . . feeling like a wrung-out rag . . . to rush around, to ride, to organise dinners, provincial tours, garden parties, ceremonial parades. The whole sizzling, boiling lot.

Lord Lloyd cared nothing for heat . . . dry or wet. His energy seemed to thrive and increase in a hot-house atmosphere. He took all the irksome social duties in his stride, as a side-show to his business of handling a Presidency of such vast size and turning inefficiency into efficiency. He did not take long to make himself unpopular in some quarters. He arrived at the Secretariat in the town one morning at nine o'clock and found no one there. He was told that no one ever came to the office till eleven. Goodness knows how many time-servers served their final time that morning. Everywhere he routed out the idle and the lethargic. He cleaned out the stable with strong, well-directed sweeps of his broom. He frightened some people out of their wits. Others he bound to him with hoops of steel.

His courtesy to the native Princes was unfailing. Every honour was paid to their rank and standing. Their due salutes were fired to the last cannon. But he did not pander to them. His method was to be firm and just, but always to remember, and to see to it that everyone else remembered, that he was the accredited representative of the King Emperor.

Such was ever his way, in every post he has held. It makes him enemies. But it gets things done : in the right way.

Enormous sums were spent on "show" in Bombay. The Governor's Bodyguard of eighty magnificent-mounted Sheiks, commanded by a grand chap by name of Nethersole, cost a packet of money. The stables were full of horses . . . and motor cars. More than fourteen hundred servants, outside and inside, went to the upkeep of the establishment in Bombay. Then there was Government House at Poona. And Government House in the hills at Mahableshwar.

Food and wine ran into hundreds of pounds a year. For ceremonial occasions semi-royal carriages with outriders drawn by eight horses were used. Our special train was like a Ritz-Carlton on wheels. In the old days everything was done on this grandiose scale. Not from any pride or self-satisfaction, but because to impress the East it is necessary to behave in the only way the East understands.

In India the ruling Princes are men of fabulous wealth. Their jewels are beyond price. At one banquet at Government House the Maharajah of Rajpipla, then a young man of incredible elegance and good looks, wore in the front of his gold turban an uncut diamond the size of a normal fist. Whenever he moved his head to speak, or to eat, the diamond threw out a light like the North Foreland lighthouse. These princes live in a blaze of splendour. Their peoples expect it of them. So it is meet that the British shall hold their own with pageant and pomp. The scoffer who ridicules the "unnecessariness" and expense of glittering display

shows abysmal ignorance of the psychology of the inhabitants of Eastern lands. . . .

You do not put on pyjamas to give orders to your household.

The Presidency of Bombay kept as high state as did the Viceroy. Bombay is the jumping-off ground for all visitors to India. Our guest bungalows were never empty. Some of their occupants were men and women of repute and charm; some were a damned nuisance.

We had all sorts, from Lady Diana Cooper's sister, Lady Elcho, whom we all loved, to a deputation of high-domed scientists from whose release we prayed hourly. These were men famed in the world of bugs, and bug-like they themselves looked. The late General Sir John Cowans, perhaps the most famous Quartermaster-General in our Army, was a delightful housemate. Our happiest time was when Lord Jellicoe came to Bombay in his flagship *New Zealand* on his world tour.

His ship feasted us and we feasted them. Jellicoe had the same knack as had my own Chief of winning unquestioning and defiant loyalty. He was a lovable man. He would talk to a subaltern as if he were talking to another Admiral of the Fleet. He was quiet and unassuming, with the straightest, keenest look I have seen in human eye. His officers and men gave him their affectionate loyalty.

It was at that early age that I began to discover, what has since proved itself to be an inescapable truth . . . that the man who has something to be

conceited about is seldom conceited. That it is the fellow who talks big and rattles his tinpot medals who is only facing out in desperate fashion his own lack of achievement. The lesson is of the utmost value. One that every youth should learn at the outset of his career in this great, big, bouncing, inexplicable world.

Within four months of our arrival in Bombay my Chief was welcomed by an outbreak of serious violence, which spread near to revolt. The flame kindled in the Punjab, spread like wildfire to Gujerat which had ever been the political storm-centre of the Presidency. The sparsely clad Mr. Ghandi is a Gujerati from Ahmedabad, and there is no doubt that Ghandi was the unrivalled leader of the extremists from 1919 till 1922, when Lord Lloyd, growing weary of the hypnotic spell under which the man with the loincloth held all British officials, promptly clapped him into prison. He took this action against all advice because the then Prince of Wales was in India at the time. Thus the antagonistic racial and political elements which had been closely held together by Ghandi and his apparent immunity from British justice fell apart.

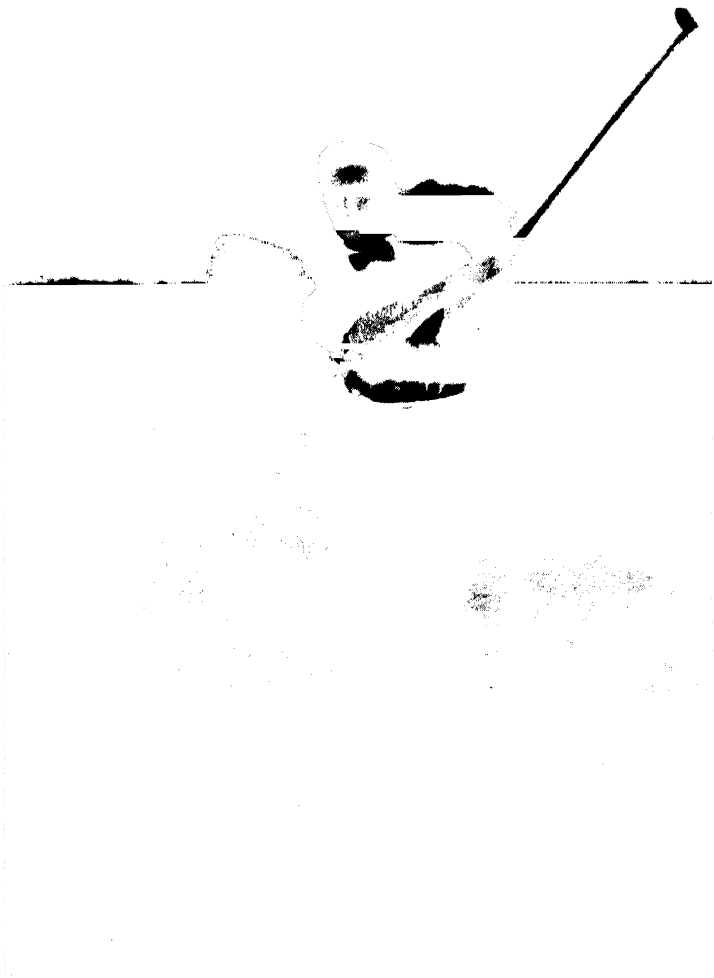
A Cotton strike made its appearance and riots were a nightly occurrence in the streets of Bombay. Things looked ugly indeed. At this period Lord Lloyd and his immediate advisers, though no one advised Lloyd for long and got away with it, were working twenty hours out of twenty-four. One night the riots assumed revolutionary proportions. The Chief of Police, a most gallant

fellow named Sir Frank Griffith—now at Scotland Yard—dashed at hourly intervals through the night up to Government House and consulted the Governor. As I was the A.D.C. on duty, I was there. The heat as usual, was hellish. The situation was grave, and in the light of a green reading lamp my Chief looked haggard with care and lack of sleep. He refused to have the troops called out . . . the Police would have to deal with the situation without bloodshed. Amritsar was not yet.

The Chief of Police, who to my knowledge had not been to bed for four nights, went back into the town and walked straight through a howling mob, dodging the stones which were thrown at him. His action did a good deal to cow the rioters.

Next day Lord Lloyd ordered his car and sent for me. We were to go into Bombay, which was seething with disorder. On such occasions my Chief always took me with him, which caused some jealousy among the staff. He liked my being with him, I think, for I never made the mistake of bowing and scraping to him.

We drove down . . . without an escort. Our car was held up time and again by rioters . . . I never expected to eat another Government House dinner. And then some blighter threw a stone at the Governor. It came hurtling towards the car, missed Lloyd and knocked my helmet off. Another two inches and I would have been *non est.* Lloyd sat back and roared with laughter, much to my chagrin. The while the Police pounced on the thrower, a villainous-looking Hindu, and bore him away.



WHEN TWENTY-ONE, PLAYING GOLF AT MAHABLESHWAR, THE GOVERNMENT HILL STATION OF THE BOMBAY RESIDENCY.

[*To face p.* 90.

"A damned good shot," Lloyd growled. But I could see he was anxious. Anyway, I had again been the means of bringing a little light relief into the proceedings. We returned to find most of the Governor's Council in a state of hysterics, gathered to dissuade him from his dangerous drive. They were a bit late. As usual.

The Hill Station of the Presidency is Mahableshwar. Thither Bombay's Governors repair when the hot weather . . . save the mark . . . comes along. And thither we went in due season, climbing, climbing eight hundred feet in motor cars and train, up to a paradise.

Sometimes when I am sick at heart . . . for such hours come to us all . . . I cast back my mind to Mahableshwar . . . to its vivid red roads, its green trees and the flowers which cover the land like a carpet. It is, I find, a soothing remembrance, and my spirits are refreshed. I seem to come again out of the parched plains into the cool of the hills.

Lovely Mahableshwar. We could breathe for a spell. No entertaining . . . no functions . . . no military parades. We went on glorious picnics—all of us. We rode, we played golf on the worst course on earth and loved it. In the evening we drove pony traps through the lanes along the crimson roads, in the cool delicious air. And here I was happy . . . for I could sometimes get my Chief to myself, and I listened to him talking, and I learned much of life.

"What are you going to do, Collie, in the

future ? " he said one day. He was worried. He always thought I was too sensitive a plant for the hurly-burly of life . . . too easily hurt . . . too responsive to kindness. Maybe I was . . . then.

Colonel Grieg and my fellow A.D.Cs. were friendly to me, especially my good friend Alan Lascelles, who is now Assistant Private Secretary to the King. His dry, caustic humour and warm heart endeared him to me greatly. He married a daughter of Lord Chelmsford, the then Viceroy, Helen Thesiger, and lived happily ever after . . . and now is ever near the King and remains the same good fellow, laughing at the world out of one corner of his mouth. Lady Lloyd had my deep regard, and little David, their son, now a large young man in the City, called me Uncle Collie and liked me chiefly, I think, because I spanked him one day, not caring at all that he was the Governor's son. He was, as I say, rather naughty, but wholly disarming. He was given a uniform like those worn by his father's Bodyguard and looked a picture in it. And highly warlike.

A visit to the Viceroy must be recorded. In some state we repaired to Delhi . . . for New Delhi was not then completed, and stayed with Lord Chelmsford. A Viceroy of India is a King. He lives in the pomp and ceremony of a king, and no man can take on the post, highly paid though it is, who has not considerable private means.

Viceregal Lodge—always hopelessly inadequate in accommodation—was too small to accommodate us, so we were housed in tents. Such tents I had

never dreamed on. Lord and Lady Lloyd had a tent of gold and blue . . . with ten rooms, glass-fronted, two bathrooms, each room quite beautifully furnished. My tent was equally untent-like, but smaller, of course . . . but the glass was there and the bathrooms, and so were the soft carpets, which gave cosily under the feet.

Word came down to us that Lord Chelmsford wished to play a single at tennis, and one of his A.D.Cs., young Lord Carnegie, who afterwards married the Princess Maud, came down with the summons. Charles Carnegie was informed that I played tennis adequately.

" His Excellency was a tennis blue at Oxford " reproved the lean and elegant Charles. He was a gentle person, and we became great friends.

It was finally arranged that I should be honoured to compete against the Viceroy. Duly sensible of the privilege vouchsafed me, and feeling extremely nervous, I repaired to the trysting place. I had as yet not seen my host.

A scarlet-clad soldier with a lance stood at either end of the court, outside the wire . . . luckily. There were four native ball boys . . . obviously chosen for their washed appearance . . . myself twiddling a racquet. A hush in the air and no Viceroy of India. Half an hour later . . . I was by this time goggling with nerves . . . a tall figure came striding down. He stooped in a scholarly fashion, and when he came closer I observed a strikingly handsome face, deeply lined with worry and the burdens of high office. I bowed and wished

him good evening in a voice which had startlingly gone a high falsetto.

The Viceroy nodded, but did not speak. He strode to the shady side of the court. But I threw up my racquet and let it fall to the ground. Viceroy or not, we were tennis players.

Lifting his eyebrows the Viceroy said " Call " in a curt voice. The racquet came down " smooth." I took the side which he had originally chosen.

In silence Lord Chelmsford served. A snorter. I sent it into the net. He won the first two games. And then I determined that even if I lay dead afterwards on the field of battle I would not allow this grave, aloof ruler to defeat me. So, with the encouraging thought that I do not expect even a Viceroy of India had ever had a P. and O. liner stopped for him, I sailed in. He won the first set . . . but only just. I won the second . . . six . . . four. All this time my opponent had never uttered. Not even to call out the score. Cuss him, I thought. After a homeric tussle I won the third set, twelve to ten. And I awaited one word of praise—or thanks.

Contemplating me glassily the Viceroy nodded, tucked his racquet under his arm and with long, loping steps, stalked off. He had never addressed me.

That night there was an enormous banquet. Manly chests were covered with medals, and gay ladies were festooned with every jewel they owned. Sixty Sikhs lined the staircase. And I counted the pearls round the neck of the Maharajah of Indore and gave up when I grew giddy. There were two

Governors and their staffs, the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Charles Munro . . . a charmer . . . and Colonel-in-Chief of my Regiment, and Generals and Colonels were two a penny. The band struck up. The Viceroy, immaculately clad, and blazing with decorations, came up the staircase and reached the top. The men bowed. The woman curtseyed . . . and the Viceroy looked straight at me . . . by years the youngest officer present, and I prayed for death.

Looking neither to right nor to left, Lord Chelmsford made directly for me. With a delightful smile he stretched out his hand. "Young man," he said, "I knew your father, Vesey, very well at Oxford. You played a very good game of tennis this afternoon. We will have a chat sometime."

Everyone looked at me. The Commander-in-Chief twinkled at me . . . and the procession formed. Crimson in the face I sank gratefully back into obscurity.

Some years afterwards I was travelling by Tube to Piccadilly. The tube thing, as usual, was full. I stepped on the foot of the next strap-hanger to me, and apologised. It was Lord Chelmsford. He looked ill—soon afterwards he died.

My memories of India come crowding in upon me . . . of nights when the sky was like a velvet softly-wrinkled curtain and the stars outshone themselves . . . and of days of work, of turmoil, of parades . . . parades . . . of tiger shoots . . . of the doings of Rajahs and the misdoings of flighty ladies who suffered—and made others suffer—from

the heat. But every curtain must fall at the appointed moment. My Indian tale is told.

The climate proved too much for me. Every day was an effort to me, the heat drained all my vitality, and one night I walked in the garden with Lord Lloyd. He told me that I must go home to England . . . he could not take more responsibility for me . . . doctor's orders. I would leave by the ship sailing in two days. So it was so . . . my Indian summer was ended . . . rather soon.

The day of departure dawned. My Chief would not see me that morning. I think he knew he was losing one of his few friends in India. Men in his position cannot easily make confidants. And to me he could talk as to a friend, and it was a relief to a tired and overworked man. Who dared not unbend by virtue of his office.

I boarded the ship and the gangway was being raised when an officer held up his hand. The gangway was hurriedly lowered and a Government House servant rushed up the gangway. He handed me an envelope. I tore it open. Inside was a note on which was written " Good-bye. Pleasant journey, and thank you. Lloyd."

We cast off, and feeling very alone, ridiculously young and sad at heart, I went below. The shores of India receded at almost indecent speed. Two days later we were in a typhoon.

Probably my fault, too.

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE chance meeting has ever played a leading role in my life. The cut-and-dried plan has so seldom come off according to schedule, but a last minute change of mind, or a sudden dart down a side alley has led me to the sign-post which has obviously been waiting for me to come along.

This confession would seem to put me down as a fatalist, but here I would in some measure venture to disagree. It seems to me that the outlook of the professional fatalist is altogether too easy. It tends to make any effort of will . . . initiative or quality of brain appear entirely waste of time and energy. I cannot subscribe to this view that if, per example, I fall beneath the wheel of a Number 11 omnibus in Trafalgar Square, at half-past three on April 15th, it follows that the very moment I was born the Almighty had planned that both the omnibus and I would meet at the prescribed time on the prescribed day in Trafalgar Square.

The Almighty surely has a great many better things to do than play games of "Look what is going to happen to you, little man." He put man on this earth probably to see what sort of a mess man would make of his sojourn thereon. He gave him a will and a mind, and a brain of his own.

Wisely the Almighty refused to accept responsibility for the futilities and the mistakes of mankind. If I happen to slide underneath omnibuses, I do so entirely on my own responsibility. God gave me two feet on which to stand upright, and if I have not learned to train them not to slide away from me, the more fool I.

To an extent the finger of Fate messes about with the pie. We are gently propelled in a certain direction . . . like the push a child gives to his toy boat on a pond . . . but it is left to us to decide whether we shall walk straight on, turn to the right or the left. Where one man will take advantage of a chance meeting, another will see no advantage to take.

Both men have been propelled, willy nilly, in the same direction. The Moving Finger has not writ that this man shall win, this man shall lose. The Finger . . . a cunning, prodding little finger, writes that the man shall lose or win according to his own personality, his own capabilities, his own flair for making the most of the right moment. Then the Moving Finger moves on and will not wipe out a word of it. Who shall blame it?

On this voyage home of mine from India, it was ordained that I should meet an individual who was to play a considerable part in my future life. But it was not ordained that I should not first recognise him for what he was . . . or that I should later take it upon me to glimpse the inner heart of that man. Having hurled us together, Fate left us to make what we could of the meeting.

The trip to Aden was appalling. For two days the vessel floated — apparently — upside down. Everyone was seasick. I was not seasick. I never am. But I was unable to eat.

But by a diet of champagne and dry biscuits I was able, unlike the P. and O. boat, to keep my head above water. I had made friends with a sad-looking passenger, Edmund Bolton, who was a banker and was known as "Putty Face." He liked me, I think, because I was polite to him. His companion, a haughty, good-looking youth, was inconceivably rude to him on every occasion and ordered him about like a dog. A strange couple . . . but I often think of Putty Face and his funny ways and the extraordinary thrall in which he was held by his companion.

We berthed at Aden and I was bidden to go to the Residency to lunch with the Resident. It was stiflingly hot. The sun beat down on this orgy of rock and there was no shade for miles. Curiously enough, men stationed at Aden grow to love it with a jealous passion. Aden has its charms, I suppose, but I failed to notice them.

The Resident was a "character," one General Scott, "Tommy Scott" to his intimates, and his death a year or so ago was a blow to all his friends. He welcomed us all—for others had come from the ship. And we sat down to lunch with the temperature mounting rapidly.

On my left sat a little round man with a merry face the colour of beetroot. Major Reilly had already served several years at Aden. He was to

serve many more and became Sir Bernard Reilly, first Governor of Aden and a devil of a dog. But he remains the same rotund, cheery fellow . . . and the uncrowned monarch of Aden. From his rocky fastness he still dispenses terrific hospitality to all who pass in the ships of the sea.

To my right sat an immense human being. He appeared to my guess, to be some 6 feet 8 inches in height. . . . The guess proved to be accurate. He had a roguish, open face, looked about thirty-three, and was crammed full of the joy of living. I took to him at once. Most of the other guests were a mouldy lot and I had had too much of the Government House atmosphere to be in the least impressed by it ever again. And here in this gigantic overgrown schoolboy I sensed a human being who was capable of acting as a gust of refreshing air in my solemn, fusty stuffiness.

He addressed himself to me and asked where I had my suits made in London. I told him. I then chatted to him freely, as one young man to another, and inquired of him whether he was the General's aide-de-camp. This amused him so much that he has never forgotten it. He told me later, on many occasions, that from that moment he knew that we were to see more of one another.

I suppose it is amusing for the Governor of Somaliland, for such was Sir Geoffrey Archer, to be asked if he is A.D.C. to the Resident of Aden. He had just been appointed to Somaliland. He took my question as a tribute to his youthful appearance and bearing, of which he was always

proud. As who is not . . . at least anyone capable of retaining the one without losing the other.

So this beaming youngish man was really rather a nib in his way. He had been the centre of a storm of contention in which, as usual, Mr. Winston Churchill had had a vast deal to say. While he was acting as Acting Commissioner in 1913, the Camel Corps was massacred under the Mad Mullah. Archer at once hurried to the rescue with his Indian escort of a few men and some friendlies. He withdrew the Camel Corps survivors, brought away the wounded and safely retreated eighty miles to the base. For this he became the youngest holder of the Order of St. Michael and St. George. This year of our meeting he was a fully-fledged Governor.

The unrestrained way he was laughing at my discomfiture gave me little indication that the next year he was to direct the combined Anglo-Italian action against the Mullah . . . this mad genius . . . which brought about the end of the power of the Dervishes in British Somaliland.

Archer was a boy like myself—at any rate at heart. And as a boy I continued to treat him. I cared not a damn whether he was a Governor or not. He came on to the boat with us, for he was going home on leave to his young wife. We talked and spent most of the voyage together and found an added tie in that we both of us tried to bring a little joy into the life of Putty Face.

When we docked at Marseilles we travelled home across France together. I said good-bye to him in London.

"It would be fun if I ever had a staff on which I could put you," he said. "Perhaps I may some day."

I made him answer. "Telegraph to me wherever I am. I'll take a chance."

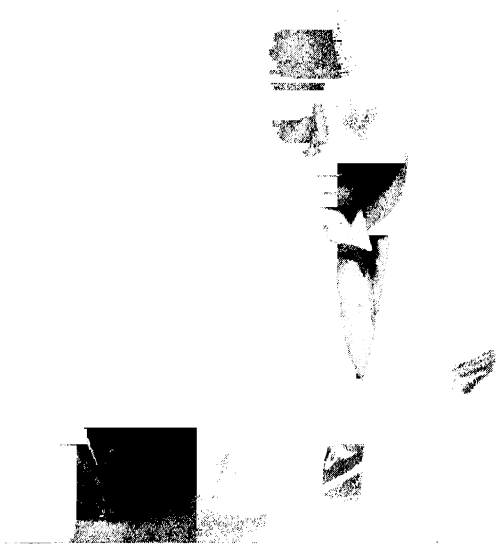
And we said farewell, he to greet his young and extremely attractive wife, and I to go home to my father, to an interview I far from relished. He never quite forgave Lloyd for sending me home to England.

And now we will make use of those fascinating little dots which were first invented by my friend Gilbert Frankau and are so invaluable in depicting the flight of time, or in slurring over a salacious situation. Thereby making it more obviously salacious than ever.

Dots, please.

Back with my regiment. My cunning little red tabs were packed away and my gilt spurs, golden aiguelettes and other glories of my Indian sojourn wrapped up in tissue paper. I shed no tears over them when I put them away, and became once more an ordinary subaltern in an infantry regiment, because I had a feeling I would want them again. Sooner than I knew.

Of a hideous time with the third battalion of my regiment at Sittingbourne in the County of Kent, the Commanding Officer who was not too kind, and his Second in Command, incredibly aptly named Death, I will not dwell overmuch. I emerged from this torture . . . by means of a



LORD LLOYD OF DOLOBRAN, P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., D.S.O.

[*To face p.* 102.

telephone call to a War Office general, a call made in my Colonel's own office. Much to his fury. I informed my General friend that unless he got me away from this boring battalion, its Commanding Officer and its hovering Death, I would commit suicide : on the spot. It is not usual for a subaltern to speak to a War Office General from his Colonel's own orderly room. But I never have done anything usual yet, and I trust I never shall.

The order for my transfer to the War Office came through the next day. This was quick going. And I am told that the Colonel and Death never recovered from the shock. As for the troops, I was sorry to leave them. They gave me a cheer as I departed to the station. And my brother officers, and there were some fine fellows among them, echoed the cheer.

I worked at the War Office in a department named A.G.4.F. Everyone was kind to me, but I was bored and detested the job. But I did not want to go back to the regimental life again. I went about a lot in London and made an immense number of excessively undesirable acquaintances.

At this time my father fell ill. He was concerned about me too, and my regimental future. He did not wish me to remain in London, but to go back to rejoin my regiment. As he, poor brave fellow, was making preparations to go over to our home in Newcastle, County Down, in the shadow of the glorious Mourne Mountains, there to wait till the cancerous infection of his throat should prove fatal, it was the least I could do to obey his wishes.

The time of the Irish " trouble " was on. Which meant that most of the population of Southern Ireland were either murdering British officers in their beds or ambushing troops on the march. Ireland was fighting for Freedom, whatever that means. So—in Ireland's name—they burned down most of their historic mansions and turned their lovely country into a hot-bed of fear, rapine, slaughter and sudden death.

I was sent to join the second battalion of the Queen's Royal Regiment, my regiment, which was stationed in the County of Cork, in a vile and muddy spot called Kilworth Camp. Here for a year I was destined to endure and suffer, and to realise that the British soldier is beyond price and that to be accounted his friend is an accolade well won indeed.

The true to type British officer has never aroused any feelings in me except those of wonderment. In all my ten years' service I never ceased to marvel at the entire lack of imagination to which most of my brothers in arms were walking examples. Their humour was of the slap-you-on-the-back variety . . . and if a comic on a stage sat down on his hat they laughed themselves sick. They mistrusted cleverness and squashed heavily any signs of " unusualness " or personality in the young and budding.

Brave, forthright, honest and utterly reliable . . . and monumentally stupid in a clever way . . . they remain the salt of the earth. The British Empire would not be the British Empire without

them. That, we should hate. My admiration for them is, and always has been, profound. At the same moment that one of the clan is irritating me almost beyond human endurance I am gripped by a feeling of slightly unwilling envy. We are miles apart . . . in thought, in action and in practically everything which—in my opinion—makes up the sum of life. But often I have found myself wishing that I were as they were . . . calm, unmoved and unable to see more than one inch or two further than their beautifully chiselled noses.

The British Army regarded its own type as the only possible type. The perfect, unemotional Public School boy became the perfect military officer. He was allowed almost any licence as covering his relations with the opposite sex so long as he did not mention their names in Mess. He was considered all that he should be so long as he never said or thought anything "witty" and so long as his life, sexually, physically and mentally ran along on clearly marked and traditionally approved lines. In fact, not a bus, but a tram.

Luckily I have always found it easy to adapt myself to my surroundings and my company. I got on very well with these fellows on the whole. They regarded me as being a trifle odd, but generously did not withhold their friendship from me on that account.

My regiment has a fine tradition and has for countless years been jealous of its reputation for discipline. The new officer joining from Sandhurst was submitted to a searching test that would in any

other land have been dubbed frightfulness, but which in England was considered merely "the thing." The wretched youth, and I speak as one having authority . . . is for the first month or two made to feel that he is but a worm and that unless he finds, and exhibits, an admirable reason for his existence, he is "for it." He must speak only when spoken to . . . and must be taught to understand that the Senior Subaltern has every authority over him except of life and death. He is left to find out things for himself. No one gives him a helping hand. He is the scrubby little new boy who yet does not in any way realise what a Heaven-given honour is his to have been permitted a commission in such a magnificent regiment.

This school of thought has many adherents, but not so many these days. As a victim, I put it down as crass stupidity and unnecessary cruelty. Only a collection of fools would refuse to see that to get the best out of a young officer, as to get the best out of anyone, young or old, it is essential to encourage and to help. By stifling every natural spontaneous instinct of the stripling, you turn out a cowed, shy man who will never in any circumstances show any initiative or step out from the herd, for fear of making an ass of himself.

I talk, of course, of other days. Now, when psychology plays so great a part in every profession, these things will be changed. The Army will never get the officers it deserves if it encourages the bringing up of the young officer idea by a process of sixth-form bullying. Present-day conditions

show that the day of the bovine military creature is over. And that in our Army the qualities of personality, initiative, and " being different " must be given their heads.

When I was in the Army it could be said that not only did the British Army march on its stomach, but thought with it into the bargain.

I joined at Kilworth as Senior Subaltern. Intending to begin as I meant to go on, I set out to make friends with the most junior of the officers, and so far as I was able, to bring out hidden qualities in them. I determined to do this. I had a bit of trouble at first with the more senior of the subalterns who told me that unless I kicked the young devils it was bad for discipline. But I lost little time in telling them to go to blazes, to which they repaired cheerfully enough. The result was that the younger officers liked me and are never likely to begin a book of reminiscences with the sentence, " My first months in the Army were a hell on earth, dear Mother." For this, posterity owes me a small something.

Kilworth Camp was set in a singularly winning plateau of mud. It was muddy enough during the summer, but in the winter we marched and drilled and played mild sports in a desert of slime. Situated where every one of the four winds could get at us, the cold in winter was intense.

We lived, officers and men, in dreary tin huts. The Mess and other buildings were nightmares of the art of the Quartermaster's Department. So far as the eye could see was more mush and slush, with a range

of grey, cold hills in the distance. I love Ireland dearly and its scenery is dear to my heart. But Kilworth was not Ireland . . . it was a Military Concentration Camp, fashioned by the untutored hand of man out of bog. Little now remains of it.

Miles away was our nearest town, Fermoy. There was nothing for the men to do, no cinemas, no cafés, and—most keenly felt loss—no women. The days were a round of inspections, parades, orderly rooms, fatigues and lectures. Civilisation had forgotten us. But here we were, and here we must stay. . . . Periodically parties of us would go out reconnoitring, to be shot at by blue-eyed, but wild, Southern Irishmen from behind hedges. And then to come swiftly home with nerves more on edge than ever.

Our Colonel, one Wingfield, was a large, kindly man with a tiny head set on a vast, lumbering body. He lived as in a dream, and beyond functioning at orderly room and emerging at special parades, he left the running of the battalion to his Adjutant. He was an elderly man, and, frankly, I think he was weary with long service and longed for easier days, well earned. We dubbed him "The Poor Cat," affectionately—officers and men. Every day when he came into the Mess prior to luncheon he would stroke the local cat and purr, "Oh, you poor cat," little knowing that he had nicknamed himself for life. He was a benevolent, kindly old gentleman and I liked him. But he was not exactly an inspiration to us or to his troops, and I do not think he intended he should be.

Conditions grew worse, and the men, who had behaved so splendidly, began to get restless. No one blamed them. It was stagnation run riot. We heard vaguely of ambushes in other parts of the "Front" and of dark doings in Dublin. Came news that some Sinn Feiners had placed a bomb under a bridge over which a battalion of the Hampshire Regiment was to pass. The battalion passed. The bomb exploded just as the Regimental Band, largely composed of beardless boys, stepped on it and blew them to bits. We raged. Why were we not allowed to do something; anything, so long as it was action?

Personally I loathed my lot, but it was no use showing it. I loved the men. Fortunately I was on the best of good terms with them and they played up like the grand fellows they were. I tried to instil a little hope and comfort into my Company by doing what I could for them. Instead of punishing every ridiculous "crime" . . . everything is a crime in the Army, from sneezing on parade to eloping with your mate's sweetheart . . . I dealt gently with them. I tried to convey that I was as bored and as unhappy as they were, but that as we were all in the same boat we had to make the best of it. They never took advantage of this method. They never do . . .

As Senior Subaltern I had several tiresome duties to perform. Such as informing one young officer spark that unless he gave up going into Fermoy and canoodling with red-haired damsels of unenviable reputation, he would be on the mat. I spoke to

him of the reputation of the regiment and meant it. Shortly afterwards he was quietly wafted into civilian life. He was not a very nice individual, but he was fed-up, like we all were.

My next excitement—any excitement was welcomed—was to tackle a brother officer who, famed as being a veritable Don Juan with the opposite sex, had conceived a strong David and Jonathan friendship for the piccolo player in the Regimental Band, a striking-looking and entirely innocent boy of seventeen. He was wont to take this lad out for walks and talk to him about life under the stars. I knew well that they did nothing else but talk under the stars—but officer and men friendships were not encouraged. It was stressed to me that it was bad for the *morale* of the Band and that the boy was getting swollen-head being made much of by an officer. And chatterers chattered . . . anything new was a relief for conversation. And wild, or obscene speculation.

So I had to summon this officer to my presence, and as he was a particular pal of mine it was all most uncomfortable. I told him that the regiment was talking and that he must not see the boy again—that personally I felt that he only sought the company of this boy, who was intelligent and attractive of mind, because most of our fellow officers were so appallingly dull. And they would not recognise a star if they saw one.

I had hit on the exact truth. The chap smiled and was good enough to say that no one else but me would have dealt with the matter like that, and

we parted in an orgy of mutual understanding. He is now married and has two sons.

The next excitement was when the Poor Cat summoned me to his office, and in front of the Adjutant, Teddy Bolton, who was at Sandhurst with me, and, though a very nice fellow at heart, was rather unpopular with the men, ordered me to grow a moustache. To which I replied that if this was a command, I would send in my papers forthwith. That not even the Army Council could force me to grow a moustache, and that I awaited his decision — strictly at attention.

Teddy Bolton . . . I wonder what has happened to him now . . . nearly threw a fit, and the Regimental Sergeant-Major retired precipitately through the door. The Poor Cat gazed at me with tired eyes and, passing his hand over his face in the exact manner of a cat washing himself, murmured, "Um—er— . . . yes, I thought you would take it like that." I remained clean-shaven.

Things were still bad in the military atmosphere. At this moment some fantastic nit-wit, sitting in the War Office in London, with his red hat cocked over one eye, decreed that the regiments in Ireland should in future be doomed to certain hours' instruction daily in educational matters. In short, that the troops should go back to school and that the officers, complete with chalk and blackboard, should become schoolmasters.

The fact that this order did not give rise to a riot in the battalion is the most striking tribute I can pay

to the discipline of the men of the Queen's Royal Regiment. But it damned nearly did.

We officers complained in a body to the Colonel. He sighed and said that orders were orders. Highly original. The Adjutant said that it would do the men a lot of good, upon which I called him an egregious ass and asked him whether he wished to become even more unpopular with the men than he was. If such a feat were possible.

The farce began. Each day we had to take our companies in history, algebra, mathematics, or geography. The first day remains vividly in my memory.

It had been decreed that A Company should "take algebra." The Company Commander had conveniently been stricken with influenza and his task fell upon me. I knew next to nothing about algebra. . . . At school I adorned the bottom of the Mathematics Form for immemorial years.

The men were gathered in one of the larger Kilworth huts. A blackboard stood in the corner. I entered. The Company Sergeant-Major yelled "Shun" and the men rattled to their feet. I told them to sit easy, or whatever the command was. I regarded my class. And a hushed silence fell. I knew perfectly well what they were thinking. Some of the men looked amused . . . some surly. And the Company thorn-in-the-flesh—an incurable shirker . . . whom I knew of old . . . was obviously out to make trouble.

I advanced to the blackboard, seized the chalk and drew an algebraic formula. Fixing a man

with my eye, I asked him if he knew what it meant. He sprang to his feet and said, "No, sir." The question passed. No one knew. I tried to explain. I stammered a bit, as I always did. The men were accustomed to it and never flickered an eyelid. I went on and then I threw the chalk on the floor.

"Men," I said, "it is patent to me that men of your high intelligence know at least one thing . . . that I know as much about algebra as you do. Which is damn all."

A roar of laughter followed. And the Colonel, the Second in Command and the stern Teddy came in at that moment.

The Poor Cat advanced. "What are you teaching the men?"

"Algebra, sir," I replied. He paused. "Um—er—er," he muttered. "Quite. Yes—quite," and departed.

The rest of the hour I spent getting the men to tell stories . . . to say what they thought of the Army, and why. The idea appealed to them and kept perfect discipline. After that my education hours were looked on as events . . . as merry minutes in a dull day. If I was not exactly educating the troops, they were certainly educating me. So that ass at the War Office did some good. The Adjutant told me that I was disobeying orders. I told him to try and stop me and see what the men did to him. Nothing happened.

Most of us look back in life on some incident with special pride . . . with special thanksgiving . . . some little incident which shows that one has

perhaps done something towards the happiness of one's fellow men.

It fell to my lot on an occasion to address the whole Company—some regimental routine. I was —as it happened—feeling desperately ill and tired, and I had had news that my father was sinking fast. My stammer was worse that day, as always when I was overtired and nervous. I spoke haltingly and then stuck at a word—badly. At that moment a man imitated me. I flushed, finished my piece and went out without further word.

The amusing fellow who had made a mock of me was then set on by the entire Company and beaten up. The Sergeant-Major never interfered . . . indeed, as I heard later, he joined in. For six days the offender was on the sick list.

It is such things which make the life of a regimental officer worth while.

I never had any interest in regimental soldiering except in the troops themselves. If more officers would confine their attentions to the welfare, the comfort and, who knows, the souls of their men instead of rushing off to play games or dallying with the local blondes, there would be no lack of recruits for the Army.

At last we could feel that we were of some use. Twenty-five Sinn Fein prisoners captured in a skirmish near Cork were sent up to us, and we had to keep them safe and sound " for the duration." They were put in a compound bristling with barbed wire. Sentries watched day and night. Such at any rate was the idea. Various high

officers came up to have a look at our charges, and I remember Major-General Cameron, a delightful man and immensely popular, drove up to inspect them. He was a bit peeved when the Poor Cat led him in the direction of the latrines. Our worthy Colonel had entirely forgotten where his guests were housed. But the General was to be much more peeved later.

We had a system of alarms in the Camp. There was one particular hooter which was only to be sounded in blazing emergency. One bitterly cold night just after midnight we were awakened by this hooter. It sounded like the day of doom. The Camp sprang into life. The troops roused themselves and the officers rushed to the Parade Ground in various stages of undress.

No one knew what had happened ; it seemed obvious that the enemy had made a night attack. Then the truth was revealed . . . every man jack of the prisoners had escaped.

Headquarters, ever ready for any emergency, had quartered six bloodhounds upon us. They were let out of their kennels and to my horror a lead was shoved into my quivering hand. Attached to it was a big, slavering dog, with rheumy, bloodshot eyes. I was instructed to take charge of the brute.

Off it leaped, and off I leaped with it, clinging on to the lead like fury. It had apparently got a scent, for it tore round in circles, till I was reeling with giddiness. Then it stopped, and with a growl it took to the fields.

The night was still cold and dark, but the dog did

not care. On and on we raced till I began to gasp for breath. I tugged at the lead, but it made no difference. The animal was after blood and nothing could stop it.

We approached a hill. Heavens, I thought, the ghastly animal is going up it. Go up it the dog did —at increased speed. I was by this time praying for relief and cursing all Sinn Feiners. At length we reached the top of this hill. The dog came to a stop with a jerk which hurled me to the ground. The animal raised its head to the skies—gave me a look of withering contempt—lay down on the ground, and went to sleep.

A pretty scene. Two o'clock in the morning. Miles from Camp . . . the wind whistling through me . . . on top of a blasted hill with an overtired bloodhound for company. Furious I lugged the beast to its feet and we retraced our steps. Fido kept on falling down and going to sleep. Never shall I forget the ignominy of that trek home. It passed into regimental history.

The prisoners were never caught. They had burrowed a tunnel under their encampment. No one had seen them or heard them. There was the devil of a row, of course, but I do not think the Poor Cat minded. He was only too glad that his uncomfortable guests had left his ken.

The boring months bore on. At length I and a brother officer of mine had an idea. Something had to be done to keep the men amused. It was near Christmas and it promised to be a dreary festival. Why not stage a pantomime?

Gerald Veasey, who was only a month or two behind me in seniority, was a born comedian. He was a great favourite with the men at concerts, and I sang a bit and had a certain knack of writing song lyrics. In fact, at that time the revue "A to Z" was on in London, and I had written four of the songs to the music of Ivor Novello. The stage had from very early years claimed my enthusiastic affection. It still does.

So we approached the Poor Cat. He looked pensive. It meant that both Gerald and myself would have to be excused almost all duties for six weeks, for the show had to be written and rehearsed. The band would have to spend all its spare time rehearsing and orchestrating the songs. Scenery would have to be made, costumes ordered . . . and the men who took part would also have to be excused regimental duty. It was a big order.

It was then that the Poor Cat proved his worth. He knew as well as we all did that unless a diversion came along we would have trouble. He approved of the idea unconditionally, to the dismay of Teddy Bolton, who never readily approved of anything that was not in Army Order Number Two Hundred and Sixty-three.

Gerald and I set to and wrote the book . . . it was "Dick Whittington" with topically Kilworthian gags, and I got hold of some popular songs of the day and rewrote the lyrics. We chose our cast . . . from the officers and the men. Bandmaster Buckle, a real character and a grand fellow, fell in with the scheme with alacrity. The

band gave up every moment to rehearsing. The men of the battalion were thrilled at the idea, and we set out to give the Division a pantomime such as they had never seen before.

A splendid theatre was made out of the biggest of the huts, to seat 400 in the audience. Our Workshop Sergeant, Sergeant Hawkins, painted the scenery himself, and few West End shows could have beaten it. We rehearsed hour after hour. Then we had to get a beauty chorus. So Gerald and I, this time with the connivance of the Adjutant, who had at last caught pantomime fever with the rest of us, picked twelve boys out of the Regimental Band.

The boys were a bit coy at first, and I nearly murdered them at rehearsals, for they behaved like blocks of wood. But slowly they thawed, and by the time the first night came along, Mr. Cochran's "Young Ladies" had nothing on them for verve, looks and sex appeal.

I took on the role of "Dick Whittington," and the Princess was played by a subaltern named Dicky Dickinson, who sustained his role with a dignity which was homeric. A vast being, Quartermaster-Sergeant Forbes, played the Emperor, Gerald played the Comic, and we had the best Cat I have ever seen. The Call Boy, who made us all up, was a lad in my company who had been Call Boy at the London Hippodrome.

Everything was set. The First Night dawned . . . and the Divisional General and the whole of the Headquarter Staff from Cork were coming. And someone had an "awful thought." What on

earth would happen if I suddenly began to stammer? The show would be ruined. I was on the stage most of the show, which ran for nearly three hours, and I had seven songs to sing.

This "awful idea" put me in a panic. The doctor was sent for, a lean and wistful cynic, and just before the curtain was due to go up he injected a stiff dose of some horror into my arm.

That did it. I could not have felt nervous if I had tried . . . I walked on air. The show went marvellously, to hurricanes of applause. My love scene with Dicky was a riot, owing to the troops yelling out, "Go on, sir, kiss her." Which I did, to the delirious approval of the troops and the joy of the Headquarter Staff.

After the performance, which succeeded beyond our wildest dreams, Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Strickland, the Divisional General, was good enough to congratulate me. He asked me how I had got hold of such a wonderful bevy of girls for the chorus.

"Damned good lookers, too, young Knox," he chuckled. I told him they were band boys. I thought he would burst. What I like to remember is that this little Fire Eater, as he was, said that in all his experience he had never seen a better Army show.

The pantomime ran for two weeks. Every night we were packed out. Officers came from all over Southern Ireland to see it. Then we went down to Fermoy for three nights and played it there. Our fame spread.

It may seem a small thing, but the effect of this pantomime on the troops was extraordinary. They took new heart, new life. Something, whatever it was, had happened just in time. Only just.

A week later I received a telegram. My father was dead. I packed up and tore home to Newcastle, County Down, and arrived just in time to catch up the funeral procession as it neared the village church.

When all the sad business was over, I determined to send in my papers to the War Office. I had no taste for the Army any more. I was placed on the Reserve. And I stayed at home in Ireland and wondered what was going to happen next.

Several months went by, and somehow I sank into a veritable slough of despair. I never wanted to go out to parties, but went for solitary walks and stayed at home nights reading and thinking. Vitality seemed to have left me, and there seemed little prospect of my landing a job. From time to time my uncles would acidly inquire whether I was going to live at home for ever—doing nothing. And the whole dreary time there was one person who never forsook me in word or deed . . . who for ever encouraged me and told my uncles not to worry me—my stepmother.

The genus Stepmother is supposed to be tyrannical and selfish. I suppose there are stepmothers like that. Mine was not. I loved her dearly and I still do. She is one of the most remarkable women I have met. She gave to my father some of the happiest years of his life and when he died the light

went out of her life. But she gave all her energies and affection to his children, as he would have wished.

She comes of the talented family of the Beerbohms. Her half-brother was the great actor, Herbert Tree. Her brother, Max, is the brilliant essayist and caricaturist. In her is all the artistic perception, the understanding and sympathy so marked in this remarkable family. She is gentle and kind, and has that deceptive vagueness of all the Trees which is not really vagueness at all but a shrewd knowledge carefully and purposely camouflaged.

My stepmother, Agnes, never ceased to hearten me. I had little money . . . and had to live chiefly on her. But we were such friends that money did not matter. Every day she would tell me that something would happen—that I was not to worry. She reiterated her faith in me. I became irritable, and difficult . . . but she never gave me a cross or reproachful word. A gem of a woman . . . and I lay this tribute at her feet.

But my stepmother was right. She usually was.

One day a telegram came. It read thus: "Have been appointed Governor of Uganda. Expect you to keep your word. Come with me as A.D.C. Cross to London at once. Am sending Ten Pounds for expenses." Signed Geoffrey Archer.

My thoughts flew back to Aden . . . to the young Governor of Somaliland and our journey home. I remembered my remarking to him, "Just send me a telegram wherever I am." Funny. The telegram lay in my hand. Now.

I wired, " Coming at once," and bade farewell to my stepmother . . . with deep gratitude. She did not seem surprised at the sudden summons to the shores of Africa which came out of a clear sky. She had never lost her faith that the luck would turn. Our comradeship is to this day an inspiration to me.

Another signpost faced my eyes. It led me this time far away . . . as a signpost had led before. . . . The East seemed fated to be mixed up in my life and to beckon me just when I was sore at heart and dispirited with things at home.

I accepted its call. Not long afterwards I left for Uganda. . . .

These chance meetings . . . a turn to the left . . . or to the right . . . which shall it be?

A chancy business. . . .

## CHAPTER SIX

UGANDA, the cosiest Protectorate of Central Africa, is like the lady in Jerome Kern's song, lovely to look at.

Nestling on the shores of Lake Victoria, for all the world like a green thought in a green shade, or a wanderer's dream come true, is to be found the little town of Entebbe, as refreshing as an English garden in June.

As we approached Entebbe, on board the good ship *Clement Hill*, a flat-bottomed curious boat which conveys passengers to Entebbe from Kisumu, the blisteringly hot port on the Kenya Colony side of the lake, we uttered bark-like sounds indicative of delight.

Not to put too fine a point upon it, we were weary and desirous of unpacking our bags and settling down. The voyage from England to East Africa is a long one, and in time one grows tired of walking decks and repeating at intervals how extraordinarily blue the sea is. The passage through the Red Sea is an experience which all travellers try to forget as soon as possible. At its worst it is torture. At its best it is torture.

Then comes the always tiresome ceremony of crossing the line . . . tiresome for those who have never crossed this imaginary nuisance.

The procedure is involved and necessitates a great amount of hearty organisation. A vast canvas swimming pool is rigged up in the forepart of the ship. On a raised platform stands a chair in which the victim is made to sit, as scantily clad as possible. It is a democratic business, this. Every passenger who has not yet " met " Father Neptune, has to go through the ordeal which a meeting with that potentate involves, whatever be his rank, temperament or fortune.

The procession forms. Father Neptune appears over the side of the vessel, fearfully and wonderfully arrayed . . . then arrive the Bears and the Barber, who is in reality Executioner-in-Chief. The Bears are chosen for physique and breadth of shoulder. It is their business to duck the victim several times, after he has been propelled from the chair into the tank. This they do with immense gusto and more than a modicum of sadism. The longer they can hold a head under the water, the louder is the applause which greets them from the other passengers who flock to see the fun.

On this occasion . . . when I was one of the Christians to be thrown to the sea lions . . . the two Bears were my chief, Geoffrey Archer, and Lord Howard de Walden, who did not allow the fact that he was a millionaire and a patron of the gentler arts to interfere with his sense of duty. They certainly looked two unmitigated ruffians, as they were clad in khaki shorts and sackcloth of inferior vintage.

I watched the first victims seat themselves in the

chairs . . . women were excused from the fun and games. They were then violently assaulted by a vast being wielding a barber's shaving brush and were lathered with some violence. Then a push, and they were in the tank, being ducked by the Bears.

Everyone behaved in a true British way. It was patent that some of the younger men were really frightened and had a hatred of being held under water, but they were not going to show it. They were on board a British ship, damn it all, and did not intend to allow their womenfolk, grinning with glee, to have cause to hang their heads in shame.

My turn came. At that time of my life I was delicate-looking ; rather like a fragile schoolboy who was not long for this world. I went through the first part of the ordeal and was duly pitched into the water. I awaited the onslaught of the Bears. To my delight the Archer Bear flung himself on the de Walden Bear and submerged him good and proper. In the ensuing confusion I clambered out, unharmed, unhonoured and unducked.

Word went round that one boy, a young officer bound to join the King's African Rifles in Kenya, was skulking in his tent. The hunt was up. The assembled company raced round the ship and found this lad hiding under his bed in his cabin. He was dragged forth, borne in triumph to the tank and thrown in head-first, clothes and all. My Chief was furious. He was a man of some sensibility and disliked unimaginative fools.

Behold here the worst fault of these British sports. They make no allowances for temperament or for being "different." That night in the smoking-room the hearties who had wreaked vengeance on the wretched boy made the welkin ring with their prowess. Stolid, ham-faced young men they were, with stolid, ham-faced souls and hides like a rhinoceros, and dull, uneventful, uninspired futures before them.

Those who had passed the test were presented with a document signed by the captain. My stupidity read as follows :

"To All To Whom These Presents Shall Come We, His Majesty's King Neptune, Send Greeting. Whereas this vessel has this day entered our Domain . . . now know ye that Captain Knox has this day been accepted as a true subject of Our Domain. In testimony whereof we have set our Seal on this fifth day of February Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-three."

Nowadays I believe that this Crossing the Line business is falling into abeyance. It will not be missed. At best it is a hooligan's outing.

The trip to Mombasa, the East African port steaming in its wet heat . . . our two days up the railway, with its wonderful sight of big game lolloping over the plains . . . to Kisumu and our embarkation on board the *Clement Hill*, had frayed our tempers and we were glad to be "nearly there."

There were four of us. Archer, Lady Archer (his wife), the Private Secretary, a clever youth with a round, pale face and the whitest, flabbiest knees in

Christendom, by name Rupert Gunnis, and myself, as A.D.C., Confidential Secretary and general thorn-in-the-flesh.

So we arrived, and as our ship glided towards Entebbe several hundred canoes shot out to meet us. The canoes were manned by natives who yelled and screamed, twisted and manœuvred, and turned their fragile barques with incredible skill.

We docked. My Chief was garbed in his full Governor's kit, in blue and gold with a white helmet with a crimson plume. As he was the tallest man ever to govern any part of Africa, he looked vastly impressive. He certainly impressed the natives: and he went on as he had begun. No native of Africa was born that he could not handle. He was a man of simple soul and could see at once into the hearts of the simple peoples with the dark skins. He could win those hearts where most men would fail. His understanding with natives was to impress itself on me in many ways and in many places. . . . It was his great strength. That and his simplicity.

I myself was clad in a new white uniform, wearing spurs, gold aiguelletes and a helmet with a gold chain strung across it. Round my waist was a scarlet sash with tassel, a shining sword, and on top of my helmet waved red and white plumes. Never, so I was informed, had any A.D.C. worn so colourful a uniform. This was not surprising, as I had designed the uniform myself, contrary to every Army Dress Regulation ever formulated.

An exceedingly smart detachment of the King's

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An exceedingly smart detachment of the King's

African Rifles met us and paid us honour. Then the leading officials greeted us, and God Save The King was played, a melody which by now I was becoming to know rather too well.

The high officials in such African slices of our Empire are men who take their high official positions seriously. They believe in the might of the British Empire, the Colonial Office and in their own dignity and comfort. Entebbe, green and lovely, was taken over by them for their houses and offices. A former Governor, Sir Hesketh Bell, quickly saw that a Government House at Entebbe would be vastly more pleasant and cooler than having the seat of Government at the real capital of the country, Kampala, twenty-five miles distant.

Sir Hesketh Bell, who later was to distinguish himself as Governor of Nigeria, and later still of Mauritius, is a man who has strong views on architecture as well as on governing. He designed the Government House at Entebbe himself . . . set high up on a hill with a wondrous view over the lake. He inclined . . . it is one of his few weaknesses . . . to the Moorish type of architecture, so he caused to be erected a building which follows no style of architecture known to man. The Governor's house, to put it bluntly, is exceedingly ugly . . . like one of our larger bungalows, drawn out of scale. But it was comfortable and roomy, and very Bell-ish. The name of Sir Hesketh will long go down in Uganda's memory, not only for his kind and wise rule, but for the rare and wonderful tale of the elephant.

Sir Hesketh is a man of small stature, and it fell to him to make an impressive entry into Kampala, where the King of Uganda dwells, with his native Parliament. Those were the days before motor-cars were known in the Uganda, and it would not have done for the Governor to enter his capital on a bicycle. So Bell, by some means which remain a mystery, got hold of a tame African elephant . . . as rare as the Dodo. He made his entry upon its back, holding an umbrella.

Uganda's Governors have ever been "characters." Archer was fortunate, for he met popularity half-way by virtue of the fact that he was the nephew of a previous Governor, Sir Frederick Jackson, now, alas, no more, who was loved alike by Europeans, Indian and the Buganda, the natives proper of Uganda. A quiet scholarly man, to know him was indeed to love him. He held sway over the populace as a father holds sway over his children. He was gentle and tolerant. He loved the birds and the flowers of the country, and was one of the most famous ornithologists of his day.

It was strange perhaps that so mild and charming a man should have made so indelible a mark in Uganda, for in his day the Kings of Uganda were fierce and cruel men, and had a way of propitiating their gods in barbarous style. And if an occasional missionary could be thrown in for good measure, so much the better for the crops and the general satisfaction of the gods.

This green land which was greeting us that day had a bloody history. For years the natives,

governed by bloodthirsty kings, had lived lawless lives. The missionary had a terrible furrow to hoe, and martyrs were many. Nowadays it is safe to say that the population of Uganda consists, in the main, of the natives, British officials, banana trees and missionaries.

In their quiet, determined way, the missionaries won the confidence of the people. To-day Uganda is a Christian country, and the natives go to worship, not in dark forest-sacrificial glades, but in two enormous cathedrals . . . one Roman Catholic—one Protestant—both in Kampala.

I had never cared for the missionary. I liked him and his kind as much as I liked the maiden ladies at home who knit socks and other garments and send them out to their "poor, unbelieving black brothers in Africa." These good ladies would be better employed working for the poor in their own country instead of interfering with the lives and religious beliefs of Eastern peoples.

But the missionary in Uganda is a fine fellow. The Protestant Bishop, Bishop Willis, was austere and thin of lip, but upright and unafraid, and his flock regarded him almost with awe. I had more in common with the Roman Catholic Missions in Uganda. Though not of the Roman faith myself, I was greatly taken by their friendly, jolly ways. They concentrated not so obviously and tautly on saving the souls of the Buganda, but on teaching them trades which would be useful to them. They preached not so frighteningly of Hell fire, but of the simpler tenets of Christianity and tried to instil into

these people, who are natural liars and thieves, the truths of loyalty, honour and comradeship.

My sojourns in the East have taught me that it is wiser to leave the religion of the peoples of the East to immemorial custom. The teaching of the Koran, for example, is closely allied to the teachings of our own Bible. It is full of wisdom and precept. The Mohammedan religion suits the East. It suits the countries which are scorched by the sun and peopled by men and women who look on their Faith not as a bauble to be worn, like a new hat, on Sundays, but a teaching—an inspiration—to carry with them all through the long, stifling days. From sunrise to sunset.

The Mohammedan who follows the example of his Prophet reverently and assiduously is no worse a fellow than the Christian. Often he is a better man. The religion of these men is their very life. They are happy-go-lucky by nature. Nothing really matters to them too much, because they regard their sojourn on earth as of no great importance. They do not need to be told by Christian missionaries that this existence should be regarded as a prelude to another and a better life in another and a happier, kindlier world. They are intensely aware of the fact. They always had been so aware long before the teachings of Christ were accepted by the inhabitants of the West.

Christianity did high service to the black folk of Uganda in that it came upon them when their country was wild and untamed and they had no religion but the religion of the sword and the witch

doctor. The missionaries gave them hope. They came to see that the God of the white man promised them peace and taught them that it is not well for mankind of any colour to live by terror and bloody murder alone.

But alas, it taught them more than that, as it has taught other Eastern lands. Through so much teaching of the ways of the white man, they realised things they would never have dreamed of. They saw and studied the behaviour of many inferior white men, the kind of citizen who, having by means of his greed, dishonesty and vice made his own country too hot for him, therefore seeks further and safer fields. Where the law will not touch him and where he can look on the black man as an animal who deserves neither consideration nor respect. The retrogade white man has much to answer for . . . and it is often difficult for Christianity to stand up against him.

It is a melancholy reflection, but one day Major Lawrence took me over the prison in Kampala. More than 70 per cent. of the prisoners were Christian converted to the Faith. They had copied the ways of the worst of the white so-called Christians. . . . In the old days, if they stole from their masters or cut off the heads of their neighbours' chickens, their Chief would without delay have them speared. Then came the teachings which they chose to misconstrue. The white man did not kill men who thieved or who were lazy. Their skins were safe. . . . Nothing else mattered.

During all my time out East I have never

employed a Christian servant—only Mohammedans. They are honest and clean. They will on occasions steal from your brother officer, but never will they steal from you, their master. And their contempt for the Christian native is profound. Not because they despise Christianity, but because they see little good in a religion which allows drunkenness and vice to go practically unpunished.

I find much to be said for the opinion of my friend, Richard Wyndham, when he wrote in his compelling book, " Gentle Savage," that he considered mission work an abomination, destined to change a contented and noble animal into a dissatisfied, half-educated, dirtily-clothed, class-conscious human being.

It is a great problem. I personally am, I hope, a good Christian, but I would never elect to interfere with the religious beliefs or customs of any other man. Whether he be white, black or coffee-coloured. To each man his sacred thoughts. To each country its religion—to each mortal his conception of God, whether it be a God of the Mohammedan, the Hindu or the Parsee. If Christian missionaries feel that it is the Divine Will that they go among the Heathen . . . though no man can be a heathen who acknowledges a God . . . and prove to them that there is no God but the Christian God, and no Christ but His Son, they must by their lives and example show that the men who believe in the White God are men of rectitude . . . of high principle and free from envy, malice and all uncharitableness. One false step . . . one

swerve from the straight path and they might as well pack up and go home. For they will do no more good in the eyes of their keen-eyed pupils, if they themselves have fallen so much as a millimetre from grace.

Here is a task to try the noblest man. Not all missionaries are good men. For a missionary is a human being and is torn like others by natural desires and natural temptations. The Uganda missionaries, irrespective of creed, compelled admiration. And it is entirely owing to the self-denial and almost æsthetic conduct of these men that Christianity flourishes in Uganda. The natives have seen that it is a religion whose priests practise what they preach.

A Sunday morning service in the Protestant Cathedral at Kampala is an event not easily forgotten. This vast building, which is nearly as big as St. Paul's, was built by the natives themselves. The congregation of several hundred Buganda, packed tight in their pews, dressed in new and spotlessly clean white clothes, follow the service with rapt attention. They sing the hymns with fervour and meaning. . . . Their black faces shine with enthusiasm and their eyes roll with the every lilt of the organ.

My Chief and I went many times to these services. Each time I marvelled. Each time I was considerably moved. For the worship was real. From the heart.

The Buganda is a pleasant fellow, but extremely ill-favoured. His type is of the negroid ; fat, squashy noses, thick lips and squat of figure, with

head almost clean-shaved. He is not a thing of beauty. The women when very young are pretty enough. They are slim and they giggle takingly, and their legs and arms are shapely. But soon they grow coarse and heavy, with enormous breasts which they have a disconcerting habit of slinging over their shoulders as they walk along.

The best-looking Buganda in the country was, and probably still is, the young Kabaka, the King, Daudi Chwa. When we were there he was a soft-voiced, shy creature with many English ways, and he was not more than twenty-one years old. The Commissioner of the Buganda Province, Lionel Sturrock, had been his tutor for some years, and he had taken the Kabaka when a small boy to London and had taught him English and British ways. The Kabaka owes a great deal to Sturrock, who was a man of high moral sense, rather severe-looking perhaps, but we all liked and respected him.

Uganda is unique in multitudinous ways, but in its native parliament its unique character is unchallenged. It is a State within a State. The Kabaka is nominally beneath the sway of the Governor, who is the representative of the King far across the seas. The Kabaka can make no serious move without the consent of the Governor, and he no longer has the power of life and death over his subjects. But although he is a king with his hands diplomatically tied, he is a potentate who could, if he chose, make things mighty uncomfortable for the British. Scratch a native and it matters little if he has been educated at Oxford or Cambridge, Rugby

or Eton. He casts away from him the aura of those worthy establishments and becomes a primeval black man, with strings of gory ancestors behind him, urging him on.

The potentate next to the king, who sits in the king's shadow, is the Prime Minister. Then come the other ministers, like unto our Cabinet. The people are ruled by big chiefs and little chiefs. The Sasa chiefs are the heads of provinces, and so on down the scale, and their territory is often vast and wild.

Over these native governors stands the British Governor, with his handful of Provincial District Commissioners and Assistant District Commissioners who live in lonely places and are stalwart and brave outposts of Empire . . . those outposts of which it is the fashion to jeer and make mock. Often on our tours to the more poisonous and unhealthy parts of the country we stayed the night with the young Assistant District Commissioner. Often a mere boy, he had to be ruler, judge, doctor and nursemaid to scattered and untutored savages in an area the size of Scotland. One night is all I could have borne in some of these festering spots. The heat, the loneliness, the mosquitoes and flying ants would have driven me mad.

Sometimes the loneliness and the fever does click some of these fellows out of gear. Then they come home to England for a spell. And if they are unfortunate they go, when on leave, to a music hall or to a smart, ambidexterously sexy comedy. They listen to the screams of laughter which greet all the

jokes about men in wide, open spaces . . . and lean, bronzed Englishmen . . .

The best adventure books that Edgar Wallace ever wrote were the adventures of Sanders of the River. He put down in simple, telling language the tales of the lives of such men of ours. He tells no more, no less than the truth.

Whatever Geoffrey Archer may be deemed to have achieved or not to have achieved in his short, too short . . . term of rulership, one fact must stand out clearly and without contradiction. He governed Uganda, not only wisely, but with that sixth sense which is only given to those who understand and love the black race. He loved Uganda. He loved its beauty and the task it gave him : he loved the sport it presaged for him, for he was a fine hunter and a first-class shot. The job was within his compass and the day he left was a bad day for the land and bad day for the prestige of the native king. And thus for Great Britain.

It did not take Archer more than two weeks to see that the native king and his ministers had been handled with incredible foolishness. The attitude of the Uganda Government had been to pay little attention to a native parliament which was to them a bit of a joke. They paid scant public honour to their king. In the official view the man who counted was the Governor, and the Secretariat, and all must bow down before them. If on occasions it was politic to bid the Kabaka and his ministers to Government House, it was right and proper that they should feel highly honoured at the invitation.

The sooner they returned to their dwellings in Kampala the better, for all that.

Here was idiocy indeed. Archer, who understands the black races far more acutely than he understands his own countrymen, put down his foot with a bang. It is a large foot and the bang made a pretty noise. All the British officials sat up and listened with a vague feeling that they were about to be jockeyed out of their comfortable complacency. For he gave them to realise that in his view Uganda belonged to the people of Uganda . . . that the British were there to help and advise, but only as honoured guests. And that honour must be paid to the native rulers.

This viewpoint astounded the British official and his British wife. They did not care for it at all. Did not this new giant of a Governor know that the natives were damned glad to have them there, and their wives too, in their country at all? The new Governor knew nothing of the kind. And duly said so. And I laughed in glee.

Archer was akin to Lloyd only in one respect. He was a tremendous stickler for pomp and show where the native was concerned. Not entirely that the native should be impressed at the might and majesty of the white man, but that he should feel that it was all in his own honour that the show was staged. No white man would have bugles blown and salutes fired for men of no account.

My Chief determined as his first work to make friends with the king and his ministers and, through them, with the people of the country. The only

way to make friends with a king, whether he be white, black or red, is to treat him as a king.

A terrific "bunderbuss" was staged. The Governor was to meet the king and his ministers in state. But instead of the Governor ordering the Kabaka to come to him at Government House, the Governor would go to the Kabaka and meet him officially and regally in his own Parliament House.

The King's African Rifles were turned out in their full strength at Kampala to give Archer and the Kabaka the royal salute. Archer, in full uniform, looking remarkably decorative and high, and I bristling with gold lace and swords, led the procession. The whole of the Governor's Council had to come too . . . and it is open to doubt whether they appreciated the privilege.

We entered a vast hall . . . wherein were gathered the principal chiefs of the country. At the far end of the hall, on a raised dais plentifully and suitably covered with leopard skins and other defunct trophies of the spear, sat the Kabaka in his kingly robes, and his ministers round him. There was a dignity of bearing sadly missing in our House of Parliament.

Thus the great meeting. The chiefs never forgot this gesture of Archer's. All through his time as Governor there was always this atmosphere of paying honour where honour was due. The natives, quick to see that their king stood high with the Government, paid their tribute in their turn, and were quiet and industrious and, in the main, sober and honest.

Compared to Bombay, the life at Government House at Entebbe was less hectic and certainly much less formal. A certain amount of entertaining had to be done, for the officials had to be invited in strict rotation. And there were the usual jealousies and the usual martyrdom of junior wives by senior female battleships.

The Governor was lucky in his Chief Secretary, who was deputed as Governor during holidays and leaves at home, though we never went back to England. Mr. E. B. Jarvis was a quietly efficient man, and he had the advantage of having a wife who, for drive and energy, compared well with Lady Willingdon in India. It is well known that Lady Willingdon was determined that her husband should be Viceroy of India and she had her way. She is also reputed to have "killed off" more A.D.C.'s than any Governor's wife in history. She set a whirling pace.

Mrs. Jarvis took charge of us all from the moment of arrival, and I do not know what we should have done without her. She was a trifle bossy and very touchy about her dignity, but her heart was of gold. My Chief liked her, but she and Lady Archer never got on too well : as was to be understood.

Lady Archer was young, slim, elegant and attractive, and blessed with many qualities of mind and character. But she did not take too kindly to official life. She would rather have been out walking with a friend than acting the great lady at a Government House garden party. No one will blame her for the thought. For Government House

parties in any climate and in any part of our Empire are beyond words irritating. But the wife of a Governor can do a lot to help or hinder her husband's career. His job is her job.

The eyes of the colony are upon her and her lightest move, or any unseemly sinking into human frivolity is seized upon, exaggerated and gossiped about in that sink of all such communities, the "Club." The Club at Entebbe was no exception. Its members chatted too much and drank too much. Reputations were torn to shreds over the sundowner. The Jarvises never darkened the Club portals, and no more did our Chief Justice, Sir Charles Griffin, or his wife. He was a fat, languid mortal with a first-class brain, and his wife was also plump and "well found," but matronly and well disposed. At times we dined with these four . . . because my Chief liked them. They were not generally popular. Few of the people we liked were popular.

Lady Archer rather misunderstood me, I think. Having been schooled in the way of the Lloyds, I knew how vastly important it was for a Governor's Lady to grin and bear the formalities attendant on her husband's position and to look pleasant. To be gracious to the timid, and to bear with the bores.

I sometimes would tell her what I thought, for I was fond of my Chief and knew that his ambition did not stop at governing Uganda. Our relationships were on the lines of an armed neutrality, occasionally flaring into open warfare. She did not understand me, and I do not expect I fully understood her, for I was young and almost as

intolerant as she was. We have both learned much since those days.

When I took on the job with Archer, I put it to him that I had no intention of coming out as A.D.C. to his wife. I never had taken orders from women and never intended to do so. Archer agreed. And though I was more than prepared to acknowledge his wife's position, I would go no further.

Lady Archer, who I repeat was young and attractive, would have liked me to run after her holding cushions. The fact that I would have seen her damned first was so obvious that easy friendship was not possible between us. A pity. For even when having one of our periodical hates, I liked her and respected her, and she is a friend of unswerving staunchness and a woman of courage and character.

On one occasion, just before a large luncheon party at Government House, Lady Archer ordered me to do something. This I resented—it was not her place to give me orders—and told her that unless she hurried up and changed her dress, she would be late for the function ; which was naughty of me. She pretended to be annoyed with me and, in fun, picked up a valli knife and waved it at me. The native servants were highly entertained. They had never seen a Governor's A.D.C. in khaki and field boots and spurs, being "seen off" by a Governor's wife. I expect that Lady Archer will smile at the recollection, though at the time she was justified in being much more angry, as I had been silly and tactless.

Beautiful Uganda . . . we all loved the country,

even if we did not all love one another. But living cheek by jowl in a climate which is dampy hot and bang on the equator, jangles the best of nerves. No white man is normal in a black country, least of all in Uganda. It is not a white man's country, with its hot house stuffiness, its tsetse fly and malarial mosquito and airless nights.

Archer frankly loathed office work and was only happy when he was out on safari trekking round his kingdom, having pot shots at wild animals *en route*. On all possible occasions he would " travel." There were no railways and no air routes those days. We would move in motor cars, the servants travelling in charabancs. And where the road ended we would take to our feet and leg it. For days on end.

Our tents and our food and our cases of champagne, without which no self-respecting Governor would invade the African Bush, were carried by native " porters." These men were hired from the chiefs . . . more than one hundred of them. The porters carried everything on their heads, and they would swing along chanting strange music as they went. They were tireless. In the van would walk our personal boys, and then we came, looking very Fortnum and Mason in open shirts and khaki shorts.

Walking behind one hundred Buganda porters on a blistering hot day in Uganda, through elephant grass and deserted tracks of country, was not without its discomforts. The smell of the porters was appalling. No one has yet been able to do full descriptive justice to the aroma wafting

from one hundred Buganda natives on the march. Probably because it beggars description. It is a hot, sticky, fleshy smell, and is apt to turn the stomach. There is nothing to be done about it. The Buganda are sublimely conscious that they give forth this odour to the sensitive European nostril. Were they to be told they would at once retaliate by saying that the smell, to them, of white people was pungent beyond belief. As is the case.

Far, far away one of our safaris took us down the lovely Semliki Valley, where the kudu, lesser and greater, the elephant and the fierce buffalo abound in hundreds. We were indeed in darkest Africa. In the evening we would pitch camp and go forth separately to shoot our meat for supper. I always disliked potting the elegant deer. He is a creature of grace and charm. Once I came on a herd of several hundred of them, peacefully grazing . . . brown, light brown and fawn-grey, with tiny heads set on arched necks and legs as shapely as any of society's " young ladies." I returned to the camp meatless, much to the annoyance of the party. They appreciated my sense of beauty in the wild, but it did little to assuage bodily hunger.

I was never a very good shot, except once, when I hit a buffalo bang in the heart at sixty yards' range. The whole herd turned. My Chief and I were lying flat on our tummies holding our breaths. It was a poignant second. If the herd had charged we would have been stampeded. The buffalo, contrary to general belief, is the most dangerous of animals. The leaders threw up their heads and

sniffed, while others rushed towards their fallen comrade. Then, like a flash, they all turned and tore into the bush. To my intense relief.

The head of this buffalo adorns my home in Ireland, stuffed by the Army and Navy Stores. A prosaic finish to a noble beast.

At the furthest point of Uganda, fringed by the Mountains of the Moon on the one side and the blue and shadowy hills of the Belgian Congo on the other, lies the vast Albert Lake. For beauty I have never seen a picture to equal it. Painted in dark colours by the hand of nature, its deep blue waters reflect a million lights, and over it all broods a silence which only Africa holds. By its shores the animals live, the shy creatures and the animals of prey, side by side. In the cool of the evening they come down to drink, the deer giving little startled backward glances and scattering at the approach of a buffalo or an elephant. Now and then the waters of the lake will heave and an enormous hippopotamus will raise its hideous head above the surface and puff and blow at the stars.

I have always thought that here by the shores of Lake Albert I had at last found the place where the wild animals come to die. Here is peace . . . for the white man is not often seen, and the native hunter dwells in villages remote from these waters. The only human life by Lake Albert is that of the primitive, native fisherman. In poor little huts he lives and asks nothing more from life than a good catch of fish. He cares nothing for governments. He has never heard of governments. His lord and

master is the little chief or headman of his straggling line of huts. He measures his days by the change of the seasons, and so long as he has his humble roof and a woman to supply his physical needs, he is content.

He is as shy as the animals which inhabit the lake shores. Like the Dinka tribe in the Sudan, he has a habit of standing on one leg for hours at a stretch. He gazes into the water. His mind is gloriously empty. He does not even wonder what lies beyond the mountains. He is born . . . he lives. And he dies. He accepts his fate without question. Such is the dweller by the lake.

We pitched our camp one evening by Lake Albert. The air was heavy and unfriendly. We had trekked far that day and were weary . . . and our first action was to divest ourselves of our shoes and socks and evict the ubiquitous jigger-flea from our feet. Among the lesser game of Uganda the jigger is king curse. It will make its home in the toe of a governor, to say nothing of his A.D.C., with the same abandon as it will take up his very undesirable residence in the foot of a house-boy.

Jiggers are tiny black fleas whose ambition in life is to burrow into the human foot. They burrow under the toe-nail and there they lay their eggs. Soon in your foot is a small, pussy bag, full of baby jiggers, and you promptly go lame. Unless you gouge the jiggers out of their lairs as soon as your foot begins to throb with pain, you may lose not only your foot but your leg. Natives and natives alone can properly evict jiggers. With a sharp

needle they flip out the pests and after an application of iodine, all is soon well. Try to perform the operation yourself and you will flay your foot in shreds.

The jiggers' twin curse which infests the big lakes are the lake flies. They travel in battalions and seem to breed in the deep waters of the lake. Like a cloud they rise and as you walk they penetrate into your eyes and nose and ears. As you talk you swallow a breath and you are choked and sick. On many a night by Lake Albert we had to eat in darkness for a light takes the fancy of these devils, and they hang like a soft, messy heap over the table and go flop—flop in the soup.

In the calm waters of the lake is to be found the barracota fish. He is a giant of his tribe, and is possessed of demoniacal strength. One man told me that he had landed one weighing one hundred and seventy pounds, and showed me a photograph complete with catch. Even then I did not believe it.

Archer got the barracota fever badly. He was determined to catch a record monster. So day after day he would row on the lake in a crazy tub of a boat, trailing tackle over the side. Often I would go with him. The sun burned us black. One day I ventured forth myself and, baiting my hook with a smaller fish, I settled down for the day. I am as poor a fisherman as I am a shot, but as so often happens in the world, the amateur gets the best bag—as opposed to the best brag.

After two hours I had a bite. I knew it was a

bite because the boat nearly turned turtle. Hanging on like grim death, I saw my line go whizzing out at such a speed that if my bare hands had touched it they would have been skinned to the bone. My boatmen uttered hoarse cries. For nearly one agonising hour my catch pulled me backwards and forwards over Lake Albert. My eyes smarted and my wrists ached. But I was determined that the fisherman whom the experts rejected would confound his detractors. I would land the fish if it killed me. It nearly did.

I landed my quarry in the end. Eventually, there lying on the bank before me, was my barracota. My companions and the natives gathered to see and marvel. It weighed eighty pounds at least. Archer, who had like me been out all day but had caught nothing but an appalling headache, looked at my fish and said : " It isn't true."

But he caught his whopper later. Then, to my relief we packed up and travelled on.

Our safaris were tireless and we covered most of Uganda that way. With many receptions *en route* from the chiefs. When we approached a town we would, with a sigh, doff our shorts and open shirts and dress up and be on parade. There were hospitals to inspect, native dances to witness, and conferences with the white officials on the spot. Uganda was not accustomed to a governor of such energy, who would turn up out of the blue and ask awkward questions. Often they wished him back in his Government House. He was an unexpected mortal.

Like most men of vast build and striking physique, he was unable to understand that anyone was capable of feeling tired. It was not that he was unsympathetic with illness. He just could not understand it. The people of the land he governed were prone to most of the ills known to civilised man. The hospitals were full and the medical organisation under Dr. Reford, the Chief Medical Officer, worked day and night to combat the three most virulent scourges—malaria, sleeping sickness and venereal disease.

Uganda was cursed with syphilis and gonorrhœa. Nearly 70 per cent. of the population, a terrible percentage, were infected with one or other of these diseases from birth. The missionary doctors were the first to make the native come for treatment, and the Government installed medical huts all over the country.

Whenever I hear young men at home say to me that a dose of gonorrhœa is no worse than a cold in the head, I long for them to have been with me on one of our periodical inspections of the medical putpots. Venereal disease can work ravages with human beings no whit worse than leprosy. And I have seen leprosy camps and pray God I shall never see another.

Once the venereal bug got at these natives and the sufferers had shirked going to the white doctor till it was too late, their faces, arms and legs became a festering mass of sores. I have seen women carrying eight-months' old children, whose puckered faces were dotted and scarred with open sores.

Their bodies were shrivelled and puny. They uttered protesting little whimpers as the doctors plunged needles into their wasted arms. Their mothers hugged them close to their breasts and returned to their huts to obey the sexual decrees of their lords and masters. To bring in due season other malformed beings to life.

Africa abounds in plagues, but the plague of syphilis is the worst. Not till the native man who is thus affected will abstain from marital relationship till he is cured by the skill of the doctors, will this plague abate. The answer to this riddle is—Never.

It is commonly supposed that the Englishman stationed in some God-forgotten African station inevitably takes unto himself a black mistress. And virtuous women at home hold up their hands in horror at the depravity to which their fellow countrymen can sink. The holding up of horror-stricken hands is usually done by women who either by virtue of natural frigidity or lack of any physical lure have never known—never will know—a sex life. In the same way that the people who sneer at society are usually the people who have never been able to get into it.

I saw a good deal of the young Assistant District Commissioners and on the whole they were a fine lot. Of their sex life I knew little. I did not enquire though once or twice I did see slim, dusky figures hovering about their bungalows. A young man plonked down in a station so unhealthy that even if he were married he could not bring out his wife,

must do one of two things, take either to boys or girls. As homosexuality among the Buganda, unlike the Arabs and their like, among whom it flourishes, is not considered an amusing pastime, the young Englishman is left with the one alternative. Eight times out of ten he takes it.

But in Uganda he runs a risk greater than he runs anywhere else—of venereal infection. His dilemma is real. Whatever he does he should not be blamed. For he is compelled by the service he has entered to work and live in a topsy-turvy wonderland. The rest must follow. Work it out for yourself.

Personally I see no difference between a young man picking up a girl in Piccadilly and " taking her home " to a young man in Africa taking to his bosom a black wife. Much more to be blamed is the picker-up of trifles in Piccadilly. For his brother, sweltering in Africa heat, treats his black girl well, looks after her family, and would never dream of insulting her by leaving two pounds on the mantelpiece.

My mind goes back to the many personalities who came my way during my two years in Uganda, and perhaps the strongest of them all was Sir Apolo Kagwa, Knight-Commander of St. Michael and St. George and the Prime Minister to the Kabaka.

Here was a man who was born to lead . . . shrewd and cunning, and, if I may be forgiven an out-of-date expression, a gentleman. Before the Kabaka grew to man's estate it was Apolo who ruled the country and kept the peace. He was a

king-maker and a chief-maker. His word was law, and as a Buganda said to me, when he walked abroad the elephants trembled. Rider Haggard would have delighted in him . . . this wise Buganda statesman.

Apolo pretended that he understood no English. But often when I made a joking remark to Archer in the middle of some of our duller and more solemn functions, I would see the eyes behind Apolo's spectacles flash in merriment. He understood English all right. But it was politic for him not to be known to do so. He did always what was politic.

The honour which King George V bestowed upon him was deserved. His broad shoulders carried a load of responsibility. And behind his charmingly ugly face . . . and he was certainly ugly . . . lurked a brain of quicksilver. When the history of Uganda comes to be written . . . with all its bloodshed, cruelty, martyrdoms and agonies, the name of Apolo Kagwa will stand high with the British people. Without him we could never have held our place. He was the rock upon which British prestige was to be built.

I knew him well and yet I did not know him at all. A curious, unfathomable man . . . but a man.

Back in Entebbe, after our many wanderings—soon to be off again—came the usual round. Parties, sing-songs, garden parties, games of tennis and walks by the lake. Quarrels, misunderstandings, reconciliations, flirtatious ladies, ladies of uneasy virtue, guards of honour, interminable

"God Save the Kings," a week with the King's African Rifles at Bombo, despatches to go to the Colonial Office, the death of my Somali servant, Abdi ; my pet lion cub which followed me upstairs and is now in the Dublin Zoo, visits from Mr. Ormsby Gore, now Lord Harlech, and his Commission, trips to Kenya, that land of great beauty and lost fortunes . . . my bouts of sunstroke and malaria . . . safari and again safari . . . those things are not easily forgotten.

In turns I was bored, unhappy, happy, exasperated and calm. Uganda taught me much. . . . Maybe I have profited by the knowledge. Maybe not. Often I deemed my time to be wasted. Now I know that not an hour was wasted. The pupil learned against his will. But the lesson remains.

It is not all jam being an A.D.C. . . . whether in India or Africa. I was luckier than most in my two chiefs. But each had his idiosyncrasies. And it was my duty to put up with them.

Archer had a passion for singing. He had a large robust voice of the "Tramp, tramp along the Highway" vintage. His wife played the piano. She played competently and was one of those musical people who regard any composer lower than Chopin with contempt and are therefore not musical at all. Lady Archer regarded my horrifying catholic taste in music with disfavour and no great tolerance.

On some evenings, when we had no functions and, mercifully, no visitors, Archer would stand by the piano and sing. He enjoyed it hugely. His favourite song was "Coaling," and night after

night I suffered this masterpiece, and loathed it with a fierce melancholy. After my Chief had sung Lady Archer would play Chopin. Always Chopin : in precise, scholarly fashion she would render the master's works with a peculiar absence of expression which bordered on the miraculous.

Archer really thought Lady Archer played the piano brilliantly. She really thought that he could sing. It was up to me, the onlooker, forced by politeness and discipline, to school myself not to go screaming into the night. All most odd. And most illuminating on the ways of mankind.

Here were two greatly varying characters. In almost all things—so far as regards tastes in common —they were as near to one another as Entebbe is to London. And yet they approached more near to one another by the side of a piano than at almost any other time. If you had told Archer that his wife, though charming, was an uninspired pianist he would have brained you with a hatchet. . . . If you had told Lady Archer that her husband, though powerful in voice, would never be a Peter Dawson, she would have withered you with a look.

Strange . . . two people standing closest and firmest together on ground of which they were, did they but realise it, dangerously uncertain.

God in heaven, that Chopin ! . . . and that " Coaling " song. . . . With so much that is gay and exciting to remember in Uganda . . . so many happy times with my Chief and his wife . . . why is it that the first memory to return to me is

of that wretched song . . . that tinkling piano? For it is always so.

This is the picture which appears in my mind, and then the rest follows . . . and the figures take shape and scenes crowd in upon the canvas till the panorama stretches before me—colourful and overcrowded.

But say Uganda to me sharply and suddenly, and I will instantly reply " Coaling." Like playing Snap.

I wonder what it means, this imperishable memory of something so unimportant, so perishable. The Greeks probably had a word for it.

Probably they still have.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Elephant killers out on the spree,
Gentlemen hunters,—one,—two,—three,
Threading the Jungle silently,
Killing for Sport and Ivory.
Beware this bloody Company.

ALL was desolation. The little clearing in the African forest which an hour ago had housed an encampment of natives in poor and squalid huts of mud and grass was a shambles. In a corner sprawled three men, and, huddled nearby, a woman and a tiny black child . . . battered to death. Their terror-stricken companions had fled far into the bush. . . . The squalid huts, flattened like corn in a gale, looked as if a mountain had borne down upon them . . . for the elephants had come, had passed, had wreaked their vengeance and were gone.

Such a sight had met my eyes and the eyes of our party—not once, but many times. Time and again the survivors of these onslaughts would build up their homes again and tend anew the banana trees on whose fruit they lived. Inevitably and inexorably at their appointed hour would come a sound like a heavily laden train rumbling through a tunnel. Then, the elephants stamping and roaring on their way, tearing up the banana trees . . .

scattering the huts and people like flies, spreading destruction and death in their path.

Occasionally when out at dinner parties in England it has been my misfortune to sit next to some vapid, soft-brained idiot of a woman who would lecture me on the shameful way in which " those poor dear elephants were hunted to death in Africa." She had once, when young, been for a ride on an elephant at the London Zoo and had " loved elephants " ever since. She had flung herself into the fray and had waged war against cruelty to these splendid beasts of the wild. To her a man who had hunted and shot an elephant was a monstrous brute who ought to be hanged without trial. Upside down, for preference.

It would then be my privilege to enquire of my companion if by any chance she had ever stood in a bush village in Central Africa soon after a herd of elephant had hurtled through. I would then tell her not to talk such unmitigated nonsense, and have the satisfaction of seeing the good soul mentally erasing my name from her visiting list.

The African elephant is wild and untamable. He is a killer. No doubt he despises his gentler, more amenable Indian brother, who allows himself to be clad in rich silken trappings and to be employed as a means of conveyance for venerable Rajahs and their distinguished visitors.

The elephant in Uganda had long been protected, and, if you can cosset so un-cosy an animal, duly cossetted. Burly and enthusiastic rich sportsmen from home who came out to what is called " get

their elephant" had to pay through the nose for the privilege. They were allowed one elephant and no more with one licence. If they shot a cow elephant by mistake—as they frequently did—their bank account was considerably depleted by enthusiastic Government clerks.

The Government saw to it that the elephant was in no danger of being stamped out and that any such stamp duty should be a high one. A large tract of country, known as the Game Reserve, was set apart for elephant and other wild animals. Here they could live—and die—without fear of man. When they entered the Preserve they were in baulk. They could be looked at through field-glasses and "shot" with cameras, but their skins were safe. They were left in peace to graze, sleep, eat and propagate their species. A paradise in which if the lion did not exactly lie down with the lamb, it was a very near thing.

But the number of elephant in Uganda soon grew to alarming proportions. One or two white hunters were given periodical short contracts by the Game Department to sally forth and kill the marauders. Some fell to the guns of the rich, enthusiastic sportsmen from England. But it was like throwing pebbles into a pond . . . disturbing for a fraction of a second the unruffled surface. No more.

Natives were terrorised. Their dwellings stampeded—their banana trees destroyed, and with them their sustenance of life. No Governor did much about the terror and the Game Department went back to bed. Till Geoffrey Archer came on

the scene and routed the Game Department well out of its slumber.

A hunter of renown himself, and a humanitarian where the comfort of his black charges was concerned, he summoned his Council and put through, not without some difficulty, a revolutionary scheme whereby six of the most competent white hunters in the country were, so to speak, put on the staff.

He called them together, gave them a salary of six hundred pounds a year and bade them go forth and slay elephants. Not for honour and glory or for the price of a hefty tusker, but for the peace of mind, and the very lives of the black folk. He tightened up the regulations by which visiting sportsmen were allowed to go elephant hunting and made them pay better money for the privilege of boasting in their clubs in Pall Mall and St. James's Street of their prowess with an elephant gun.

For a considerable while following this startling move, everyone in Uganda talked elephants. This was nothing devastatingly new. The elephant as a subject of conversational monologue had ever been first in this over-crowded field. The number of subjects for small talk . . . or big talk . . . in such communities in our far-flung Empire are strictly limited. And the man who has killed something is safe as houses for many a free round of " chota pegs."

The only people who never talked about elephants, if they could with politeness avoid it, were the professional hunters. These worthies would disappear for weeks on end into the bush . . . plying

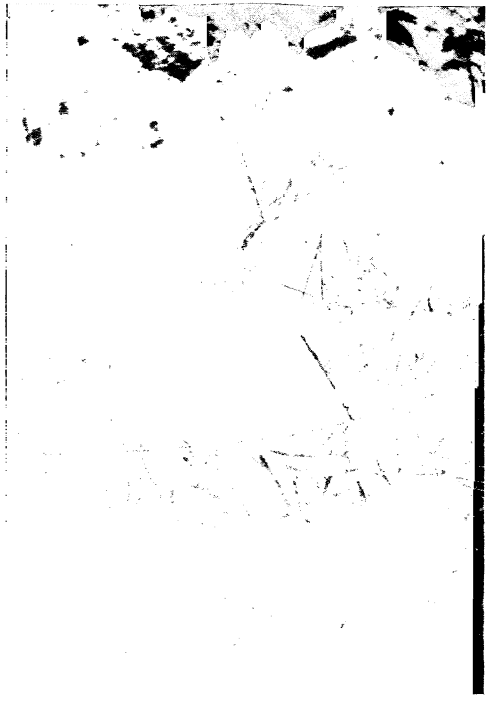
their dangerous trade . . . and then turn up washed and shaved, in the local club, and launch out on giddy and monumental binges.

The hunters were all men of individual character. One of them was practically stone deaf and talked in shy whispers. But he had killed his four hundred elephants. As the first requisite of efficiently tackling the African elephant is perfect sight, iron nerves and acute hearing, the feat was sufficiently remarkable.

Most of these men did their killing out of a sense of duty and not out of any personal dislike of the elephant tribe. And all of them did their hunting on foot. It is " not done " to shoot elephants from a safe and convenient perch in a tree, out in Central Africa. There are no trees in the African bush, safe or otherwise. The hunters literally took their lives in their hands each time they set forth. They were not overpaid.

One exception there was to this non-hating rule . . . to this " it hurts me more than it hurts you " attitude. And he was an exception to most of the rules of any game. His name is Captain Salmon and from one end of Africa to the other, and round the fires in every native encampment, he was referred to as " Samarki." This is truly a mighty man of valour and the bravest of the native hunters sat at his feet and marvelled.

Samarki is destined to become a legend. On the day he dies the tales of his doings will be recounted to awestruck children, whether their skins be black or white. This hunter a mighty man is he. A man



THE BABY ELEPHANT CAUGHT IN A "GAME TRAP" IN THE BUSH IN UGANDA—LEFT BEHIND BY THE HERD.

"SAMARKI"—THE ELEPHANTS' ENEMY.

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with one aim in life and one relentless purpose. Any man with one set purpose is a man of whom it is well to take care. He walks in a straight line with unwavering eyes.

When I first met Samarki he had recently added his eight hundredth elephant to his bag. Every time he planted his shot bang in the head or heart of his quarry he would murmur " Take that, damn you ! " between his teeth. His native bearers would look at one another and nod their heads understandingly. This was a white man who hated all elephants . . . a man whom all elephants feared.

Once on a hunt he had slipped and fallen just as he had come face to face with his prey. With a roar the elephant was upon him . . . for it would never occur to Samarki to take a long shot. Twenty yards distance was his maximum.

The infuriated elephant picked him up in his trunk and waved him over his head. Then, with a mighty heave, it sent him hurtling far over the tops of the tall elephant grass.

Samarki broke countless ribs, and, to quote his own words, was an unholy mess. For months he was on the sick list. But in his mind beat an iron determination to get well . . . for one reason. That he could return to the attack. Where before he had hunted for sport and for gain, in future he was to hunt for hate. It was to be war to the death.

I met him first after he had returned from a periodical hate-Safari. In the club in Kampala, it was. The reaction was upon Samarki and he was morose and had lowered an astonishing amount

of alcohol without turning a hair. He had the clear blue eyes and the distant look of the average airman. The look of all those who venture forth alone.

Of medium height, stockily built, with a quiet and divertingly dry way of speaking, Samarki appealed to me vastly. He had a way of pushing aside eager hunting questioners which was both modest and firm. Here I felt instinctively was not only a champion " potter " of marauding elephants but also a champion debunker of insincerity and humbug. My heart has frequently warmed towards people—rare beings—who have long since been clever enough to realise exactly how many beans really make five, and to stick to that knowledge in spite of any cold mathematical calculation to the contrary.

This highly unusual individual turned to me.

" Ever been on an elephant shoot ? " he asked. I have omitted to mention that he was invariably laconic.

I replied that I had not yet had that pleasure, but that I did not particularly wish to, as I had been long enough in Uganda to grow bored to distraction at the veriest mention of the infernal animal. I also said, with perfect truth, that I would be much too frightened to go after an elephant and that I left such hobbies to strong, silent men with cold blue eyes. For I was A.D.C. to a mortal who was ever a hunter before he was a Governor. His favourite elephant story I knew well. Had I not heard it with varying embellishments at least seven hundred times ?

Samarki laughed. He seemed to find my candour refreshing. He said that if I was frightened of elephants I was not as afraid of them as he was. This was reassuring of him, but delightfully untrue.

The wary reader will at this point grow restless. With ready intuition he will sense that I am about to tell a story of "How I Shot my Elephant." Small blame to him. I have on railway journeys and in ships' bunks often read true-to-life accounts of men who have "got" their elephant. I have been forced to the conclusion that they had no need to take a rifle with them in order to spifficate an elephant . . . they could with ease have bored any sensitive animal to death.

Most amateur hunters about whose exploits I have had the misfortune to read in books or to listen to by word of mouth have taken themselves, their daring and their elephants with unbelievable seriousness. I have been made aware, long before the rifle has been raised to the shoulder that I am sitting in the presence of one who has either taken to big game hunting "to get away from it all" . . . or "to try and forget." And one whose frame is wiry—the frame of a god who eats nails for breakfast. A type which is not unamusing in books, but impossible in real life.

When Samarki took me forth on my elephant hunt . . . for his determination to kill me off was intense and could not be gainsaid . . . he took with him a young man who went not only rather unwillingly to the slaughter . . . creeping like a snail unwillingly to hunt, but a young man who felt

that he was making, to quote a current "hit" song, one of the greatest mistakes of his life.

Even though I have in my time slept in deserts, on roofs during tropical sandstorms, and in the African bush, I do not care for these things. I never was cut out to rough it with any feeling of self-satisfaction. Far preferable to me is a comfortable bed and a certainty that if I do happen to awake to another day, I shall not awake to find myself surrounded by voracious wild animals. To the head hunters, their heads. For myself, I have no liking for living in rooms decorated with scooped-out skulls . . . of buffalo, rhinocerous or bison, even when "treated" by Messrs. Rowland Ward.

Samarki made all the arrangements. He got together the stores . . . heaven bless Mister Fortnum and Mister Mason . . . engaged the "porters," saw to the tents and even lent me an elephant gun of back-aching weight.

I received instruction in the proper handling of an elephant gun. This is a fearsome armament with a recoil which paralyses the unaccustomed shoulder. No other gun will kill an elephant in the hand of an amateur. These guns are very big, very heavy and very expensive.

To the ribald cheers of the Government House staff, with particular reference to Lady Archer and young Gunnis, we set off for the place where the elephants live. Archer gave me his condescendingly paternal blessing. He thought it all excessively entertaining, but I think he was pleased that I had agreed to go, and gratified that Samarki

had invited me. This hunter was no respecter of persons, and an invitation for a personally conducted Samarkian elephant tour was an honour for which many a rich and burly sportsman had pleaded and waved his money bags in vain.

So long as I live I shall never forget that expedition.

I had with me a gun bearer and my invaluable Somali servant, Abdi. Our little party got under weigh. We went by car to " where the road ends " and then plunged in off the beaten track. Then began the Great Walk.

At night in a clearing in the bush we pitched our camp. The porters unloaded and the Askaris put up the tents . . . small and cosy tents which our human luggage vans carried on uncomplaining heads. Our cook, a Buganda of limited but adequate talent, obliged with the invariable chicken. The African chicken is small and skinny, and welcomes death as a relief from being carried head downwards on a pole slung over his tormentor's shoulder. This food is cheap. When a minor Chief or Head Man wishes to do the white an honour, he sends presents of chickens and of eggs . . . eggs laid out on green leaves and ranged in strict order of precedence.

A fire was laid outside our tents to keep unpleasant animals at bay. During the night I heard the grumble of lions in the distance and could see the flicker of the friendly blaze throwing patterns on the tent. I slept ill . . . till the snores of the mighty hunter in the tent next to mine and the humming

chatter of our natives, who apparently could live without sleep, lulled me off into the land of unconsciousness, to dream of hand-to-hand fights with fearsome monsters with eight heads and seventeen legs.

At five o'clock in the morning we were awakened. . . . The camp was struck and we set off again. We were determined to travel as far as we could before the sun came out. Soon enough it would be blisteringly hot and the going would be heavy and weary.

Two native hunters suddenly leaped out of the undergrowth—as was their nimble way—and conferred darkly with Samarki in the Swahili language. A herd of elephant had been sighted moving swiftly north.

The Semliki Valley was not our objective, but a dense belt of country further north. We appeared to have hit on a herd without much delay and soon we came on the first tracks. Enormous footmarks and droppings of elephants with a magnificent disregard for the decencies.

Here followed a "mystery." Samarki and our native bearers concluded, after an intensive study of the spoor, that there were at least four bull elephants in the herd and many cows. One track in particular marked the presence of a huge tusker. His trail was known to the natives . . . they estimated the size of his ivory to a pound. Here, then, was our quarry. But where?

For two days more we trekked onwards, each night halting and camping by the spoor of our

quarry. Elephants travel at an amazing speed. By this time I was excited, but tired and burned a brown which would have cost a thousand pounds in a beauty parlour. Flesh fell off me like snowflakes off a window . . . though I was always thin. And to my horror I observed by a glance in my shaving mirror (portable) one morning that I was rapidly turning into the lean, bronzed, silent man so beloved of our women novelists.

Our progress from now on was slowed down by the elephant grass . . . towering high over our heads. Impenetrable except where the tiny bush paths, made by the march of the animal tribe, gave us a clear path road. Now and again we would halt and hack our way through . . . panting in the heat and pausing only to brush away the rivers of sweat which poured down our faces.

The sun was at its height one afternoon when we were stopped dead in our tracks by piercing screams. I turned quickly to my gun bearer. Samarki smiled and made no move for his gun. To my growing alarm I had come to observe that he never troubled how near or how far from his side his gun bearer walked. He himself was wont to dash on ahead carrying his famous stick in which he had cut notches for every elephant he had killed. I had long since ordered my gun bearer never to leave my side on pain of fearful penalties. Really, I was never cut out for this sort of thing.

The screams redoubled in volume. With a nod to me Samarki set off at a run. We perforce had to follow. He had a mania for running at great

speeds towards trouble, which made me most uneasy.

We pushed our way behind him along the tiny track and suddenly in a clearing . . . stamped flat by the elephants . . . we came on the screamer. In a hole was wedged a tiny baby elephant. Terrified, left alone, this baby, like all babies, was yelling for its mother.

The hole was a trap dug for wild game which the natives had set. I doubt whether a trap had ever bagged so vociferous a victim before.

The tiny creature was well and truly stuck. The air rang with its protests. Its mother had apparently not noticed its absence and had gone on with the rest of the herd.

"She will come back," said Samarki, "and soon." This information I disliked particularly. It is forbidden to shoot cow elephants unless they attack first.

We set ourselves there and then to form a Society for the Protection of Baby Elephants. Samarki and I advanced to the baby. . . . Heaven knows what it weighed. . . . Seizing hold of the convenient portions of its anatomy, we pulled like mad. Nothing happened except that the baby excelled itself for all time with its vocal offerings. Again we pulled. And the little eyes gleamed viciously and with precious little gratitude. Praying that it is true that elephants never forget and that the baby would not fail to tell its mother how noble we had been, I set my teeth and heaved away. Our bearers lent a hand. . . .

With a superhuman heave we tugged the infant half-way out of its prison, only to see it sink back again with a thud. Samarki mopped his forehead and roared with laughter. My mind was more concentrated on the imminent return of its mother. Unless she had crossed into the Belgian Congo in a couple of strides, she must have heard her offspring's yells.

"Wait a minute," said Samarki, "I must take its photograph." The picture was taken, probably the only one of its kind in existence. It is now slightly faded but is still sufficiently clear to bear witness that I do not lie. Which to any human being telling stories of wild animal hunts is a blessing from heaven.

Three-quarters of an hour we toiled on our rescue work. The baby was now too exhausted to utter . . . exhausted as much by its own efforts to evade our helping hands as by fright and loneliness. For myself I was aching all over. Then after a particularly concerted heave on the part of the entire party we prised it out of the hole.

The baby scrambled to its feet, trumpeted shrilly through its ridiculously slender trunk, and promptly knocked me head over heels. Wheeling, it barged into the elephant grass up the path, and so out of sight. Not a word of thanks.

We sat upon the ground and drank copiously from our water bottles. Not for long. We heard a sound like the Flying Scot whizzing across points, and earth and grass was sent flying in all directions.

"That," said Samarki, slowly and deliberately

replacing the stopper on his water bottle, " will be Mamma."

The natives sprang to their feet . . . alarmed. I confess I felt pale. I snatched my gun from my boy and prepared for the onslaught. Samarki's bearer rushed to his master's side with his gun, but his master made no move to take it. Silent, watchful, he leaned on his walking stick and waited.

An enterprising photographer could then have taken a wonderful picture of still life. Graven images all, we dared not move. I could not have stirred if I had wished, and I prayed that Samarki did not know how nervous I was feeling. For a chap must not be afraid, and all that sort of balderdash.

It came. At the far end of the little path in the " grass " appeared a female elephant, hurtling along under her own steam. With head well down and ears laid back she charged towards us. Still Samarki made no move. I made to put up my gun. He turned his head a fraction in my direction and said, " Leave this to me."

A charging elephant is a frightening apparition. The earth very literally shakes, and you are transfixed by a large black mass which, like a trick of a cinema producer, grows larger . . . larger . . . every second.

The infuriated mother was now only thirty yards from Samarki, still travelling at high speed. He had taken his stand in front of me. Then . . . at last. . . . He threw down his walking stick, seized his gun from his by now badly scared bearer, and

brought it like a flash up to his shoulder. There was a report like the explosion of seven hundred ginger-beer bottle corks, a piercing scream and two tons of elephant crashed to the ground. And lay still. Dead as a doornail . . . dead as an elephant could be.

Uttering hoarse cries, the natives leaped towards the animal, and I inspected the mighty ruin.

"Good God!" I cried to Samarki, "you got her with the head shot."

The elephant for all his size is almost bullet-proof, except in two places . . . in his heart and in a tiny part of his head, just above the eye, though some hunters will disagree. Either you hit that spot bang . . . or the bullet goes a fraction too high, a fraction too low, and bounces off, defeated by the cast-iron muscles which protect the mighty head.

To have tried the head shot . . . the most difficult of all shots . . . on a charging elephant was exactly the sort of madness Samarki would undertake. Had he missed he would have been killed, and so would I. It never occurred to him that he could miss. It had occurred to me.

"I think," I said to this calm companion of mine, "I should like to go home, please. I don't take to such goings on."

I went on, of course. Samarki was determined I should get my elephant if he had to hold the gun for me and press the trigger himself. A "cow," apparently, did not count. Anyway, I had done nothing but stand still and shake from head to foot.

For four days more we trekked on . . . disturb-

ing on our way herds of buffalo, and shooting meat for our supper. Buffalo tongue is of exquisite flavour. My feet were blistered and my legs ached intolerably. The heat was intense. By now I was a trifle bored, though not with Samarki. At night we smoked and talked philosophy. His views on life were forthright and of single purpose. Like the holder thereof.

The climax of it all which, though I knew it not, was hourly approaching, has burned itself into my memory. It was to prove the second time I was to come within a hand-shake of death. Once on a mortuary slab . . . once in an African bush. What was to be the next?

We had travelled nearly one hundred miles away from our starting-out point . . . sixty miles on foot. Our herd, with the giant bull amongst them, was very near us. So near that at night we heard the rumbling and the trumpeting. We were in the midst of the elephants. It was impossible to gauge how far away they actually were. Once aware of our nearness they might take fright and away they would go even quicker, and we would have to pack up. My leave of absence was over as it was. It was not possible to communicate with my Chief, or with any civilisation. Only native runners could bear the message and even in relays it would take a week to get word through.

We had more or less made up our minds to turn back. To my relief. I did not care whether I shot an elephant or not. I had seen some sport and had had a week of living in the wilds, a week of open air,

sizzling sun and interminable walking. I was fit as a fiddle, though my bones still ached.

As is so often the way when, reluctantly or not, one decides to chuck in one's hand the merry little sprites of Fate took their hand in the game.

We were walking warily. Once the herd got our scent we were done and we might have to face another charge this time. The elephant grass was taller and more tangled than ever. We had to push our way through, stop, battle through again, and stop. Thus for hours. We talked only in whispers, and suddenly I had an urge that we had walked verily into the middle of trouble. Samarki had the same feeling . . . for by this time he had communicated some of his uncanny bush sense to me.

We rounded a turn in the path. Before us, looming like a monster in a nightmare, stood an elephant . . . the Bull . . . our quarry. Immense in height it was, and the towering grass had hidden it from human sight.

The elephant was eight feet away from Samarki and myself when we pulled up dead. Candidly, I was more afraid than I had ever been in my life before. Samarki's lip twitched, and I could see that he had been taken unawares. He had never been in a more dangerous position in his career, and he had brought me into it.

Motionless the elephant stood, glowering above us, a veritable giant. His tiny beady eyes glittered like jewels in the head of a gargoyle. Our guns were already to our shoulders. I could not understand why Samarki did not tell me to shoot, till he

whispered, " He can't see us. Don't shoot till I tell you. If you miss we are finished."

The elephant is partially blind. It is his sense of smell which warns him of his enemies. When he charges he charges " on scent " and not on sight. Vaguely I remembered all this. My heart was beating like a tom-tom, thumping against my ribs. It seemed as if it must of itself shout my presence to the beast in front of me.

And then the elephant began to lower his head. It was a matter of a second, for it had focussed its eyes and seen us. Down, down came the great head.

" Now," hissed Samarki, " heart shot."

Closing my eyes—I never shall believe I took any aim—I pressed the trigger. The shot crashed out and the recoil rocked me on my feet. I opened my eyes. I had missed, of course, and now death was certain.

So I reflected . . . when to my unspeakable relief the monster sank with a boom to the ground—to his knees—then over to his side. . . . The wicked eyes shone desperately for a second and then closed. He was dead . . . dead.

The feeling of relief was beyond my control. White as a sheet and trembling, I felt tears well into my eyes. The suspense of withholding my fire till Samarki gave me the word and watching that awful head lowering was enough to strain the nerves of the most experienced hunter. And I was a boy and an amateur. My weakness may be forgiven me, I hope.

Samarki came over towards me and patted my shoulder. "Damned good," he said. "It was a very near thing. I never thought you would have the nerve to hold your fire." His hand shook a trifle. A pregnant moment.

Well, there was my elephant . . . my prize . . . and alone I had done it. Heavens above, the tales I would tell at the Club!

Over the heart of the beast I passed my hand. I lay full length along the elephant and gazed piercingly for the signs of the bullet hole which had laid him low. The skin . . . tough and wrinkly . . . was untouched. The heart had ceased to function all right. What then? The beast was unquestionably dead. Had he died of old age . . . of heart failure? My eyes travelled upwards towards the eye . . . up and over to the brain. There, for the sight of disillusion to perceive, was a hole. A small, neat, round hole . . . made by a bullet straight and unerring in its flight . . . the work of a crack shot.

I scrambled off the elephant, as by this time our natives were hacking it to bits with knives, for tasty morsels, and looked Samarki in the eye. This gentleman was sharpening a knife on his shoe with Shylockian gesture.

"So you shot him, after all!" I said. It was impossible for me, try how I might, to keep the bitterness out of my voice. Those tears were maddeningly near again.

Samarki denied my imputation. He lied valiantly, but of course I knew. At the exact

moment I had aimed at the heart he had aimed at the head.

"I had to do it," he explained after a while. "You had done damned well, better than most boys would have done. But it was a question of your not missing or a messy end for us all. But it is your elephant all the same."

Reloading my gun I put it to my bruised shoulder and fired it over the tall grass. It echoed . . . echoed and died with a wail. And at the sound the whole herd, invisible and silent all around us, stampeded into the distance. It was a defiant gesture.

I felt that the whole world could hear that shot.

Two shots rang out in a crowded street in Cairo. The Sirdar of Egypt and Governor-General of the Sudan, Sir Lee Stack, on a visit to Lord Allenby, High Commissioner of Egypt, slumped down in his Rolls-Royce motor car, mortally wounded. His A.D.C. stifled a cry as a bullet tore into his arm.

His assassins, Egyptian students, in the grips of political passion and heroin, had fired the rifle. The Police pounced upon the crowd searching for the assailants. Not till long afterwards were they captured.

The English chauffeur—who was untouched—drove at sixty miles an hour through the streets of Cairo to the Residency. The Sirdar was laid on a sofa in the High Commissioner's study. Blood poured from him. It was hopeless. In an hour, in the

SIR GEOFFREY ARCHER, K.C.M.G., WHEN GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE SUDAN.

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presence of Lord Allenby and of Mr. Asquith, who was a guest in the house on a visit, there passed away a gallant gentleman and a man of infinite charm of character.

As the bullet from my gun echoed across the tall grass in an African desert thousands of miles away, the story of this assassination echoed round the world. It shocked the peoples of all nations. Sir Lee Stack, as I can bear witness, was beloved by everyone . . . by the Egyptians and the Sudanese. He had never made an enemy in his life. Like one of his great predecessors, General Gordon, in whose palace he lived in Khartoum, Sir Lee embodied in himself the true spirit of Christianity where'er he walked abroad.

Two days later Lord Allenby, grim of visage and with fury in his heart, rode in full Field Marshal's uniform through the streets of Cairo at the head of his own regiment of Lancers. He went in procession to the Abdin Palace, the Palace of the King of Egypt, where he demanded justice against the assassins and abject regret and apology to the British Government.

Silently he rode at the head of his men. Silently he returned. Cairo has never forgotten the sight, and never will. It was a magnificent gesture on behalf of a man who was his friend, and for the good name of his country.

The shots that rang out that day in Cairo were to change the course of the life of my Chief, Sir Geoffrey Archer, and the course of my own life. They were to herald more adventures and an

ending of bitter disappointment for the man I served.

. . . . . .

Blissfully unaware of these ominous happenings and of what they presaged, Samarki and I made tracks for home. Two natives bore in triumph one of the feet of the elephant, which smelt to glory and nearly asphyxiated us. The foot, cunningly made into a whisky decanter holder, now stands in my home in Ireland and is occasionally found useful for the striking of matches. To such base uses . . .

Samarki bade me farewell. I was sorry to see the last of him, as I had grown to have a high regard for his bravery and his simplicity of spirit.

When the then Duke and Duchess of York passed through Uganda on their East African tour some time afterwards, it was Samarki who was chosen to pilot the Duke on his first elephant shoot. The Duke duly bagged a beauty of a tusker which, unlike myself, he himself shot.

One fine May morning in Piccadilly, when my Eastern days were over and my life ran on vastly different lines, I passed a queue of people waiting for a 'bus at the rush hour. A generously bosomed woman, armed with shopping basket and whirling an umbrella over her head, headed the rush for the 'bus and knocked off the hat of a thick-set, patient-looking man. As he turned, no whit incommoded by this unprovoked assault, I tapped him on the shoulder.

" Hallo, Samarki," I said. " Why don't you try the heart shot ? "

Samarki still lives in Uganda, and month by month this hunter cuts one more revengeful notch in his walking stick. His enemies the elephants still scent his approach miles away and confer darkly among themselves. Their implacable foe is abroad. And in the native encampments the name of Samarki goes whispering round the fires . . . for a mighty man is he.

Three weeks after I had rejoined my Chief, he called me into his study. He told me that, backed up by Mr. Winston Churchill, who had never forgotten Archer's deeds in Somaliland, he had been recommended to succeed Sir Lee Stack as Sirdar and Governor-General of the Sudan. The Colonial and Foreign Offices had agreed to make the appointment and for the first time to appoint a civilian to the post.

We were, so Archer told me, to leave in five days for Khartoum. He did not ask me whether I was coming with him. He took it for granted.

Followed a hectic round of packings, official and unofficial farewells. Gunnis chose to go home ; and Archer, his wife and our Somali servants with Ibrahim Seyd, the devoted Sudanese bodyguard of Archer's, who had been with him for years, bade farewell to sunny, happy Uganda.

The good ship *Clement Hill* saw the end of us, as she had seen the beginning. The Guard of Honour was in full force, and officials, high and low, pompous and humble, dressed in their best uniforms, took leave of us.

In this fashion did Sir Geoffrey Archer go to take

up his heavy new responsibilities, bearing his blushing honours thick upon him at the age of forty-four.

We stood on the top deck of the *Clement Hill* and waved good-bye till the forest of cheering people receded slowly from our sight. Into a mist.

This was the year of Grace Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-four . . . a little more than two years since Uganda had greeted us.

The sun which was functioning in its best form suddenly darted behind a cloud. A chill breeze sprang up and I shivered as if a bird of ill-omen had flown over my head, brushing my face with its outspread wings.

An unaccountable feeling of depression came over me . . . not for myself. But for my Chief. Radiantly happy he stood, chatting to the Captain of the boat—the plumes of his helmet tossing in the wind—a smile on his face.

Here was a man at an early age taking over a high command with every prospect in front of him of greater glory in his Service. From strength to strength. From little friendly Uganda to vast, unknown Sudan. Was this not an occasion for rejoicing ?

The sun had disappeared for good and the wind blew colder. I shivered. And went below.

The mantle of foreboding clung to me. I shivered again.

My Chief called out to me to come up on the bridge and see the last of Uganda. Slowly, unhappily, and with halting feet, I mounted to the bridge.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

ONE evening Noel Coward emerged from the theatre after having witnessed a performance of one of those all-singing, all-dancing, all-flesh productions. The show in question—curiously enough—had not come from his pen.

Coward was asked what he thought of the performance . . . what was his criticism. He gazed at the sky for a moment and then replied, with that air of smiling impertinence which to my knowledge he has had since he was aged sixteen and a half, " It is very BIG."

The Sudan is very BIG. It is so big that the mind reels, for it is not possible to sit down calmly to contemplate a country like the Sudan. It is made up of too many tribes, too many warring factions and a great deal too much history. There is, in effect, a deal too much of it.

On January 26th, 1885, General Gordon, the then Governor-General of the Sudan, fell speared to death by the army of the notorious Mahdi, Mohammed Ahmed, and Khartoum fell into his hands. And Great Britain rang with the shame of Gordon's death, and Queen Victoria, with bitter heart cried out, " Too late ! " History blushes for a moment.

Since Gordon passed into the ranks of the martyrs,

the Sudan has made amazing strides forward under the joint rule of Britain and Egypt. At the time when the Archer party were struggling towards the Sudan it would have been impossible for the most energetic Governor-General personally to cover the land he ruled, for the Sudan boasts an area of one million square miles. Most of the tribes were cut off at certain times of the year. To-day things are changed. The Sudan is served by Air Liners from Cairo to the Cape, while Khartoum and Juba are blessed by a weekly Air Service in both directions. Progress.

In two days the Governor-General of this day can reach the most remote tribe. And he can be on the spot with bewildering suddenness. All this must be very wonderful and of immense value from the angle of efficient government. But not nearly such fun. Camels are so much more exciting a means of transport than aeroplanes.

On the afternoon of that day in December, 1924, we set forth for the new job of work, vast areas in the Sudan were not only devoid of all means of communication, but had not even been explored. Vast are its distances, vast its problems, its emptiness, its deserts, jungles and forests. And vast are its resources and as vast are the difficulties of developing them. Its peoples range from the semi-Nomad Arabs in the North to further South, where a large variety of Negroid tribes are still in the nakedness stage, and, to my mind, are none the worse for it.

We were travelling away from dear green Uganda

to a land which in the words of Dick Wyndham has six million native inhabitants, nine hundred white officials (most of them Oxford and Cambridge " Blues ") and four hotels, and headaching problems of administration.

The Colonial Office had told Archer that he had to get to Khartoum as quickly as possible. We pored over maps and tried to make out the best and quickest route. Archer was dying to be " up and at 'em " and to take over his command. He was eager and vividly optimistic. After all, he was only forty odd at the time, and forty odd . . . if fit, healthy and six foot several inches in height, is very young indeed. And far from odd.

The best route was for us to go by motor car and lake steamer through Butiaba up to Nimule, and from thence make for Rejaf on the banks of the Nile, where a Nile steamer would be waiting to take us to Khartoum, a journey of roughly ten days by water.

When we began to discuss that " Nimule to Rejaf " waste, my heart sank. Nearly eighty miles of parched, desolate country, practically uninhabited. There were no means of transport, except one . . . on two flat feet. The prospect of walking seventy miles through that ghastly country to a new job, new surroundings, new everything, appalled me. It appalled all of us—except Archer. Nothing appalled Archer—except a mosquito.

Never before had a Governor-General walked across Africa to his new post. Archer was the first. He will be the last. For now there is not only an

aeroplane junction but also a wonderful road from Rejaf to Nimule and, for all I know, milk bars and soda fountains at the thirstier stopping places. But our party did add to a tiny slice of history by foot-slogging the entire way . . . and by convincing the officials awaiting our arrival in the Sudan that the new Governor-General must either be raving mad or very gravely in need of exercise.

It was the dreariest and the longest walk imaginable. The country is hideous. For miles and miles there is no water. Birds there are none and few wild animals, for there is no vegetation . . . and the few natives who dwell in this completely hellish area . . . vast as it is . . . are thin and skinny and wear a look of pained resignation, as must be worn by those for whom life could not possibly hold any worse fate.

Plod . . . plod . . . plod. We walked along only because we had to " get there." Otherwise none of us would have gone on after the first two days. But the Colonial Office had spoken and said " QUICK march " and my Chief had a respect for that Office of British Government which is not invariably shared by all those who dwell, and suffer, under its shadow. If the Colonial Office had ordered him to travel backwards instead of forwards he would have complied with the command. Just one of Archer's weaknesses . . . a terrific respect towards authority and an unshakable belief in the all-seeing power and wisdom of Cabinet Ministers. Maybe it is not such a weakness after all.

We would come on a river and have to wade across it. Lady Archer, to her eternal credit, walked every inch of those seventy miles—the wading and all. At the start of each day I would implore her to allow the natives to carry her in the curiously shaped carrying-chair which a conscientious Provincial Commissioner had indented for at the last moment. She would refuse and say "You can be carried if you like." This appeal to my better nature, to my manhood, never ceased to infuriate me . . . for I would have liked nothing better than to have been carried aloft by four hefty natives—smell they never so pungently.

It is only fair to myself to record that I, too, walked the whole way. Not because I wished to do so, but because I damned well had to do so.

The only member of the expedition who did not walk the whole way . . . who had to be carried at the last by groaning natives . . . was the mighty hunter . . . the man who was never tired or ill . . . the Big White Chief himself.

One night when only three days from Rejaf we pitched our camp. I was sitting on a log, longing for a bath and a magnum of champagne, when Mohammed Ali, one of Archer's Somali servants, came rushing up to me.

"Archer Sahib very ill, bwana," he cried. "Come quick."

Archer was lying flat on his back on his camp bed, like a tired giant, and Lady Archer was vainly trying to delve into a medical chest by the light of a candle. The sick man moaned and turned from

side to side, the while the sweat ran down his face. He whispered that he had been poisoned. And I now believe that to be true . . . whether from food or from design I know not.

We did not know what to do. His servants, who adored him, stood round with puckered foreheads, gabbling in Swahili. We had no doctor. We were at least fifty miles from a doctor. Our aspirin had run out. Everything had run out.

All night Archer lay like a felled tree. None of us slept. I saw visions of black headlines: "Governor-General Dies On Lonely Trek" and "Tragic End to Mad Walk Across Africa." But worst of all I thought that if he did die I would lose not only one of the best friends I had ever had but also the most invigorating companion. And the thought was not comforting.

At daybreak Archer got up. To the general consternation. He insisted on going on. Nothing we could say could dissuade him. Heavens, these strong men!

"You can't walk," I said to him. "You will have to be carried."

I think that Lady Archer as well as myself saw the amusing side of this rather frightening business. We had so often been told that we were silly ever to feel ill and that bad health was a matter of nerves. Here indeed was the biter bit.

Chewing our lips to keep from laughing, we helped Archer to clamber into the carrying chair. He was a fearful weight and his legs dangled over the side. The bearers had been picked for their strength and

powers of endurance. They lifted up Archer, carrying-chair and all, and with a crash let both fall to the ground. . . . Terrified they were, the poor lambs. They had not bargained to have to carry St. Paul's Cathedral on a diet of rice and oleaginous ghee.

Archer cursed and stormed and Lady Archer and I laughed till the tears ran down our cheeks. The procession would form and the carrying chair with its human freight would totter along for half a mile. The bearers, worn out and gasping for breath, would then put the chair and the Governor-General down. The welkin would echo with gubernatorial protests.

We had all waited for something like this to happen, to relieve the awful tension of the conditions of march. All of us that night, when Archer lay raving in half-consciousness, had been extremely frightened.

At last Archer gave an order. "Put me down at once," he said. "I'll walk." And walk he did . . . right up to Rejaf. Astounding recuperation and only possible in a man like this, whose rather convenient imagination protected him from any nerve crisis. Or from any such ailments to which most of us are prone.

We straggled into Rejaf closely resembling a picture by one of those artists whose hobby it is to adorn many a modest home with such masterpieces as "The Last Outpost" or "Gone At the Wind." Our breasts were filled with a pleasurable sense of "something attempted, something done."

Our faces were unshaved and we were extremely dirty and short of temper. Except Lady Archer. She maintained her serenity and appeared to have stepped out of Messrs. Swan and Edgar's window, a living example of what the smart African exploress should wear. Our Somali servants, arrogant and winning as ever, greeted Rejaf as yet another place on the globe to be shown where it got off. The world was their oyster.

In front of us, as we crawled round the corner, lay the Nile. It was not at that moment I came fully to appreciate all the beauty and mystery of the river, for my attention was concentrated upon what was lying on top of the waters. Proudly gleaming, white from top to stern, was anchored the good ship *Isis*, the pick of all the Nile vessels . . . fitted up like a little liner and bristling with electric fans, refrigerators and other delights.

A flat-bottomed boat . . . with three decks, she sat so gracefully and with such poise on the water, as if conscious of the honour that was to be hers of conveying the new Governor-General to Khartoum. On my eager gaze there struck a wondrous sight . . . on the top deck, discreetly shaded from the burning sun, stood a table. On the table stood bottles . . . and bottles . . .

I began to run . . . for it was essential for me I should make out the inscriptions on the labels. No one who has had to do without the luxury of a whiskey and soda for several days in a tropical climate . . . or who has walked for seventy miles through unending dreariness will blame me. Never

was such a sight so welcome . . . or fair picture so appreciated. If this was still life, who would move?

We reached the gangway. We were a funny-looking lot. Archer could more easily have been taken for a battered stoker than for a White Hope of the Colonial Office. And I myself was covered with dust and insect bites.

The Sudan Government Service lays great store by the right thing at the right moment, and is easily shocked. The exquisitely-turned-out being who was awaiting aboard to welcome us to the Sudan shivered visibly. From the top of his perfectly fitting topee to his carefully polished heels this member of the Governor-General's Council was exactly right . . . the whole ensemble proclaiming that Mr. Harold Macmichael, Commander of St. Michael and St. George, was an ornament to his Service.

Our "Ambassador" that day from Khartoum is now Sir Harold Macmichael and is ruling over Palestine wisely and well, and, if I know him at all, with considerable shrewdness. If ever a man wore on his chest a placard telling the world "I shall succeed" this chap did. He oozed, not conceit or self-satisfaction, but intense calm and dignity, as of one a trifle withdrawn from other men, and none the less sure of himself and his star.

He would never actually say that the Sudan was lucky to have in its service an official of such brilliance. He was a brilliant conversationalist and scholar, but he would be faintly, though none the less very "well-bredly," surprised if the country

did fail to be aware of its fortune. He was ever so faintly pompous but with a heaven-sent humour which came so unexpectedly that you looked at the man for a second time . . . with more understanding eyes.

I once asked Macmichael—why, I do not recall now—if he had ever met the late Lord Curzon. "We are closely related," he replied. Which explained everything.

The acting Governor-General, Sir Wasey Sterry, brooding in Khartoum, a man with whom my Chief all too soon was to find less than nothing in common, could not have sent a more knowledgeable guide or a readier reckoner of the facts of any and every situation. Macmichael knew the Sudan better than any man in the Service.

He knew and understood the natives and could talk a fascinating number of languages. He was quiet and tactful. And of a caustic wit. My first impression of him, which did not wear off for some time, was that either he was a man who kept human emotion under iron control or a philosopher who viewed life and human beings as mathematical problems. He was so cold and poised. I felt that at an early age, having discovered that the possession of a heart is not only a bar to super-efficiency but an infernal nuisance to boot, determined to get along in life without it.

He could talk, and indeed often did, of the wonderful colours with which a sunset over the Nile painted the sky, but he gave no indication that the wondrous sight stirred anything in him but his

sense of the perfection of a good job of work by the Almighty.

I liked Macmichael and admired him. In him were lacking so many of the drawbacks which were a constant curse to myself. I relied so much on the expression of human emotion, on the sympathetic word to tide over the unsympathetic moment, on the personal touch, and the sentiments of life. Macmichael not only cared for none of these things, but putting them down as definite weaknesses, cut them clean out. One could never get to know him. . . . He would smell the approach of intimate questioning a mile away, and ward it off as a skilful boxer parries a blow.

Here was a man so certain of himself and yet so unceasingly on the defensive. A paradoxical fellow, but absorbingly productive of data to the student of humanity.

Our pretty little boat bore us gaily down the Nile, now and then bumping on to sandbanks. The crew would leap to their posts and with long poles push us off into deep water. But it was not often that we bumped. The native helmsmen who stood at the wheel like graven images had an uncanny knowledge of every current and every obstacle. They were able to see under water with eyes which never tired during our 1,096 miles of journey.

The weather changed almost imperceptibly after we left Mongalla, and our ship slowed down. We were about to enter one of the most unhealthy parts of the earth, where the malarial and sleeping

sickness mosquito flourishes and where live inhabitants of incredible personal beauty.

If ever beauty flourished in spite of evil, it flourished here in the deadly province of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, which has now been abolished as a province of its own. Its climate and its evil spirits still remain.

On either side of our boat stretched an unbroken wall of papyrus grass. . . . We had entered the dread Sudd. The river narrowed and wound in and out like a snake with St. Vitus's dance.

Our view from the top deck gave us a nightmare. Our gaze ranged over miles of deep, foul swamp relieved only by the horizon. The Sudd covers an area the size of England. If the papyrus and masses of water plants become stationary, the roots grow together. They take root or jam in the channels of the river till the path of the ship is blocked by a vast, solid mass of fœtid, decaying vegetable matter. The aroma is about as fragrant as the interior of the Lion House at the Zoo . . . the atmosphere is impregnated with death and dissolution.

The Arabs have a saying that God laughed when he made the Sudan and that the Sudd is made of the waste material with which the Almighty would not soil His hands. So He dumped it all together, to the intense discomfort of His peoples.

He must have indulged in a particularly hearty laugh one year when an Italian official found that his way down the Bahr-el-Ghazal river was blocked by masses of sudd so huge that not only was he

wedged in fast on every side but the flora was of sufficient thickness to walk upon. This unhappy man suffered sore privations and barely won through with his life.

But the Almighty must have repented of so disfiguring part of His creation with so unsightly, useless and devilish a joke. Nothing uglier has ever found its way upon the earth. So the Almighty decided, as a *beau jeste*, to people the surrounding country with light-skinned savages of rare grace and comeliness. He put Apollo to dwell in a dung heap . . . *pour encourager les autres.*

Other and worthier pens than mine have told of the beauty of the Dinkas, the Shilluks and the Nuers . . . of their slender forms and their perfection of physical fitness. It would take a thousand pens adequately to convey the acute pleasure their appearance gives to the inward and the outward eye.

Our boat tied up at the little Dinka village of Bor, near where an Egyptian Post was established by General Gordon in the year 1874. The papyrus grass brushed our cabin windows—the engine whirred and with a jerk we would get free and by dint of cannonading from one side of an impenetrable mass of muck to the other, we eventually tied up. I swear I could hear the good ship *Isis* sigh with relief as the engines choughed-choughed to silence and with a furious splutter of torment sank to stillness.

We went ashore. The Dinkas had arranged to do a dance in our honour. The Dinkas, the

Shilluks, and Nuers, unlike the Italians, the Argentines and the Greeks, wear no clothing. They are as Nature made them and Nature was in her most artistic mood. The women are not more beautiful than the men. The men are not more beautiful than the women. They are all startlingly ravishing to the artistic eye . . . all equally slender, all walking with a freedom and grace of movement which any debutante practising for her first Court would give her mother's pearls to emulate.

The young men are all tall with narrow hips, and faces boasting tiny noses, well-shaped mouths and large, luminous eyes. And white teeth which they flash with an unconscious abandon which is their heritage. The girls are short and light and slender . . . and except for one or two natural and essential differences in structure, are exactly like their brothers and husbands. Except that the males are curiously effeminate in walk and gesture.

We sat ourselves on high stools in the middle of two hundred naked savages. The dancers-in-chief had adorned themselves with animal feathers and had slashed white and black paint across their faces. They squatted on their haunches, regarding us with solemn eyes. I felt that they were looking at our silly clothes and our awkward bodies with more than contempt. "We will dance for these ugly white folk," I felt they were saying. "It is only polite. But we do not care much for the look of them."

Two enormous savages beat loudly on drums of hippopotamus hide, for the river abounds with these

animals, and the dance began. I glanced at Lady Archer, the only woman of our party, and kicked myself for a momentary spasm of self-consciousness. As if the nakedness mattered . . . it was the beauty that counted. How futile are the inhibitions engendered by our so-called civilisation. As the dancers warmed up I recalled a holiday spent in the South of France when several scores of my countrymen sprawled around on artificially constructed rocks in hideous semi-nakedness. Their fat, sagging stomachs, their fleshy hips, their puffy, flabby, pallid faces, made me sick. Their flesh was the colour of beetroot in the sun. Offences to the eye . . . to every artistic taste. I reflected that these people were actually glorying in their bodies and wondered that any human beings could be so blind or so ineffably hideous to behold. The Dinkas would have run from the sight of them, hiding their luminous eyes from the offending view . . . deeply and inexpressibly shocked.

Like all savage dances the Dinka dance was unashamedly sexual. From the first to the last wriggle. The men and girls leaped into the air making fantastic contortions and humming a monotonous chant to the boom of the drums. The painted men advanced towards the girls sideways and with little jerky steps. The girls stood their ground, shaking and shivering, swaying from their hips to the wild music. Wilder and wilder grew the dance. Wilder and wilder the mood of the dancers, and more and more unrestrained and obvious the meaning of the dance . . . till with a

crash from the drums the leaping warriors threw themselves with one convulsive lunge in the air and fell prostrate on the ground. The girls laughed and screamed with shrilly voices and clapped their tiny hands. All was still.

What on earth was Archer going to say to this astonishing performance? To say "Thank you, that was very nice" would be ridiculous. To make a speech saying that he thought the dancers were all very clever and very beautiful would be equally stupid. Our entertainers were perfectly well aware of their beauty . . . as conscious of that fact as they were unconscious that they were stark naked.

So my Chief said nothing. There was nothing to say. He bowed, left the ground, and we followed him.

The Sudan Government in its infinite wisdom has forbidden missionaries to settle in the lands of these children of beauty. Like all men and women who live and die as naked as the day of their birth, they are moral to a degree. Prostitution and the taking of another man's wife, the raping of a child, are punished with savage and cruel punishments.

Sexual excesses which are found amusing to a degree by some of the frequenters of West End Night Clubs in London would be regarded with horror by these chocolate-coloured marvels.

The missionary, no doubt with the best intentions, would dress up these children in clothes and at one fell swoop destroy for ever their innocence of mind and body. The lives which are healthy and of an Utopian nature would soon become open to every

awful awareness of civilised teachings and precepts. They would tell lies, they would steal and they would indulge in every sexual excess. To preach to these peoples that the human body is something of which to be ashamed would be criminal. It is these teachings of our civilised pastors and masters which lead to much of the misery of our race and fill our lunatic asylums and prisons.

Here, guarded by the barrier of the Sudd, dwell the real civilised beings of the world . . . primitively jealous of their rites and customs and primitively childlike and unspoiled. Their favours are neither bought nor sold. They barter neither their souls nor their bodies for gold . . . for they have no need of it. The earth which bore them gives them their bodily needs in sufficient abundance.

The Dinkas, the Shilluks, the Nuers . . . you are the happy people of the world. I pass on and salute you. As our ship bears us on our way to the things that do not matter and the people who do not count, I wave my hand in greeting. And farewell. Your drums beat, beat till we are out of sight and the green mass of Sudd swallows us up.

The time has come. Khartoum has been sighted and as we chug-chug into the White Nile and see Omdurman on our left bank, there is all the awful business of getting into full uniform once again. Guards of Honour . . . bands playing . . . inspections . . . introductions to the official world and its wives. Petty jealousies, back-bitings, dust and heat, mosquitoes and sand flies, dinner parties and garden parties, fluffy women and stuffy-minded

men, one or two great friends at the most. Dressing-up . . . undressing . . . dressing-up . . . all over again. And God Save The King ringing in our ears, greeting us here, greeting us there . . . the pomp, the ceremony, the emptiness, the futility; and yet all so vitally necessary.

The Sudd and the happy warriors had eaten into my brain. I buckled on my sword, adjusted my gold aiguellettes, snapped on my spurs and ruffled the plumes of my helmet and cursed inwardly. What the hell was the use of my going on like this, in this sort of job? I had had enough of it to teach me all it could teach me. And much that it had taught me was bitter.

Arranging this . . . arranging that. For ever on parade . . . strutting in front of my Chief, past innumerable Guards of Honour . . . being talked about, discussed and dissected by every busybody. If, as I always tried to do, I behaved like a decent young man, the chatter would go around that I was dull and did not care for women. One heavily married woman snubbed . . . oh, these hot climates! . . . and the vixen would tell her cronies that I must obviously have some nameless vice or else why would I not welcome the freely-offered charms of so desirable a creature?

There, drawing near, was the landing stage of Khartoum . . . troops, officials, generals, colonels, Provincial Governors, Tom, Dick and Harry drawn up in line. I had a sudden urge to jump over the side of the boat and escape. To escape back to England and try to take up some profession in which

I could make my way by my own efforts . . . where I could come down to earth once more and get back my faith in my fellow men.

I knew nobody in the Sudan. To the hordes of officials, their wives and sisters . . . I would be just another A.D.C., a young man to be cultivated because, as in India . . . as in Uganda . . . it was a bore not to be asked to form part of the Government House "set" . . . an infliction worse than cancer not to be bidden to the Governor's table. Were I to go no one would mind.

Lady Archer would be charming and solicitous as ever, but she would be secretly rather glad to see the last of me. I felt that. Harold Macmichael would not even notice my departure, and only be sorry for a fleeting second in his cool, detached way.

Such reflections would never do. Must be the heat. Must be the reaction after that ghastly walk across Africa. For I knew that were I really to go, my Chief would miss me. Like Lloyd he would have no one young to talk to were I to vanish. I did not take too much upon myself, or flatter myself unduly. My Chief had had real need of me once or twice before. In the coming days, in this strange country, he would have greater need of me. And over me there came on again that feeling of foreboding . . . like a soft wind lightly stirring the tree tops and rustling the branches.

We landed at nine o'clock in the morning of January 5th, 1925. Everything followed as per schedule. And with the strains of God Save the

King ringing in my ears, I entered the Palace at Archer's heels. Yes, it was a Palace this time.

I observed the tall, bowed figure of an elderly Sudanese standing rigidly at the Palace entrance . . . with a lined, seamed face and tired bloodshot eyes. He must be incredibly old, I thought. I asked who he was.

" He was Gordon's servant," I was told.

We appeared to have arrived.

From December to March the climate of Khartoum is delightful, with pleasantly sunny days and cool nights. The rest of the year the climate is entirely sanguinary.

The Haboob comes upon the land and fills the air with clouds of desert sand. The nights are as hot as the days and there is little chance of sleep. Special trains run from Khartoum packed with the women folk of Khartoum, bound for England, home and health. Their pallid husbands throng the station and return to their work . . . their offices, their native commands, prepared to face the coming months of hell-fire like gallant little men.

During April and May I found it impossible to sleep in my bedroom. So I had a bed made up on the roof of the Palace and tried to woo sleep 'neath the stars. Twisting and turning from side to side, endeavouring to find a cool corner of the pillow, I lay awake. When drowsiness at length came upon me in blessed waves, I was jerked back to full consciousness at one o'clock in the morning by a feeling of suffocation. The Haboob was upon us.

Whirling from across the Nile, up from Omdur-

man and the desert, the sand would come, hovering high in the air, then swooping and covering everything with its filthiness. The air grew black . . . a breath and you swallowed pints of desert sand. Gathering up my bedclothes, choking and coughing as I went, I made for my room downstairs. Here the heat was furnace hot . . . and through every crack in the windows came the sand, filling the room, filling the cupboards and the drawers, coating the clothes. Sleep was impossible. My usual practice then was to go and sit in the bath and wonder what on earth had made me come to so God-forsaken a country.

The Palace at Khartoum—our home—is a vast building constructed in shining white tiers like an iced cake . . . with a large courtyard and wide terraces. Two white staircases curve down from the first terrace into the garden where a fountain plays and flowers are inconspicuous by their absence.

Facing the Nile, with a wonderful view across to the desert beyond, the Palace stands an imposing sentinel of British might. It was built on the site and on the foundations of the house in which Gordon lived and the curving staircase to the right, as you face the gardens, marks the exact spot where Gordon died. A follower of the Mahdi speared him as he stood waiting, unarmed, and carried away his head in triumph back to the camp of the Mahdi.

My office lay within seven yards of this unhappy spot. Facing me was a plaque commemorating the murder . . . and in the garden Gordon's rose tree

grows, flourishing strangely alone in a parched wilderness of plants and tired shrubs.

Permission was given to tourists to enter the Palace and take photographs of Gordon's death-place. They had to apply to the Aide de Camp . . . to wit, myself. Most of the sightseers were Americans, and they afforded me constant worry and amusement. Out came their cameras and snap went the shutters. They chatted like thrilled magpies and plied me with questions. They wanted to have a peep at the Governor-General. I told them that the Governor-General was not a peep-show, but that just to make them happy I would ask Gordon's servant if he would pose for them.

"Gordon's servant! Oh my, but that's cute," they cried. I beckoned to the old man. Slowly, with considerable dignity, he came walking up . . . it was part of his duties to keep my office tidy and stand guard. Then he would stand still, and bear with the photographers with a stoicism born of long usage. Invariably he would stand just at the bottom of the staircase, gazing upwards. His thoughts were long, long thoughts. The ordeal over, he would bow and walk away . . . with lagging steps. And I would suddenly curse inwardly at all tourists and chattering visitors who so unthinkingly disturbed such precious memories.

In the office next to mine sat Colonel Kenny, Archer's Military Secretary, a lean, slim man with a deceptive veneer and an attractive Russian wife. He and I would have got on well enough together if almost from the first moment of arrival

he had not appeared to be in the throes of the peculiar belief that I would take orders from him. He was soon to be disabused of his curious hallucination.

No man should attempt to serve two masters. For myself it has ever been my way to give my allegiance to one master and to him alone. My loyalty once given is freely and entirely surrendered. My personal loyalties have always held me back in the world of money, and had I invariably followed my secret heart instead of allowing myself to be bound hand and foot by an almost fantastic sense of gratitude, I should to-day be considerably better off than I am. Better off in the eyes of the world.

Always I have served the man and not the machine . . . even when, as has more than once occurred, the man concerned has let me down with a careless bump. Even still does this ridiculous failing of mine hold sway.

But in the words of the private soldier, I will not be "mucked about." I have served so many people at the top of their trees that I have never easily heeded those on the lower branches. Nor will I hear my masters lightly criticised. If I wish to criticise them to myself and have my own private hates, well and good. But no one else shall take such liberties in my hearing. A strangely Eastern outlook, this . . . and there is deeper feeling in the Eastern loyalties than in those of the West.

My Chief who was always much too ready to be impressed by any man's opinion of himself and to take human beings at their face value, now and

again stumbled into pits out of which I had perforce to drag him to safety.

Archer began to find that the problems of the Sudan were vastly different to the problems of the Uganda. He had never been accustomed to office work. His governing, both in Somaliland and Uganda had been accomplished by personal contacts . . . by dealings with tribes on their own doorsteps. This he did most successfully. In the Sudan the natives were scattered over so vast an area that to make a personal impression was well nigh impossible. Office routine tied him by the leg. He could seldom get away. When he did decide to travel about the country his officials in the Sudan frowned heavily and whispered darkly that they were accustomed to a Governor-General who sat on his behind in the ice-caked Palace and took advice.

Archer never liked taking advice. He was convinced that he knew a great deal more about handling natives than did office-bound Civil servants. Here he was right. But there were intricate puzzles to be solved . . . puzzles of cotton, of irrigation, of land, of finance. . . . These irked him.

Two of his advisers, Sir Wasey Sterry and Sir George Schuster, this last a strikingly handsome and brilliant financier, who later was to shine even more brightly as Finance Member of Council to the Viceroy of India, held his nose to the grindstone. Sterry was a wise, dry, acid-witted man with a legal brain and a young wife. Schuster was

needle-brained and astute with vivid personal qualities. He perhaps of them all understood and saw that Archer was fretful. He over-ruled the others and tried to persuade my Chief in the end to go round the Sudan, to be a nomadic Governor-General and to use his undoubted personality on the natives. And to let the actual Governing be done by the officials in Khartoum.

Archer refused to be merely a figure-head. He was torn this way and that. Day by day he grew more worried, more irritable, more easily vexed. At such times he and I would go in our launch up the river, past Omdurman to where the Blue and the White Nile meet in little, cheery eddies, and the breeze fanned into life by our stout little craft would fall gratefully upon us. Archer would not speak, except now and then he would point to a duck in flight with longing eyes.

He was very fortunate in his Private Secretary, Roy Bardsley, a "Blue" and an Oxford and Lancashire cricketer . . . a remarkably all-round athlete. Afterwards he was to become Governor of the Blue Nile Province, the vast cotton district on which so much of the wealth of the Sudan depends.

To a large extent the governing of the Sudan is in the hands of Old Blues . . . J. A. Gillan, a famous Oxford oar, A. G. Pawson, a double Blue . . . everywhere one went the world of athletics was upheld. Every man in the Service was hand-picked, not for the number of head-aching examinations he had passed, but for his character and promise in the handling of men.

The Sudan gives the lie to the rather fatuous general premise that athletes are dead from the neck up. They have learned to run their own shows without screaming for help from mother. They are even-tempered and whether their work takes them into the blistering plains or the remotest corners of the desert, their steady nerves and sense of fair play stand them in good stead. The type of efficiency in which the Sudan stands in need is found in these healthy and clear-eyed young men. They are natural leaders. And as such are of a brand that perhaps no other country can offer. They lead without whips and threats but by their example, and enthusiasm.

One day we were summoned to Cairo, to the Residency where Lord Allenby reigned as High Commissioner and was over-lord of both Egypt and the Sudan.

By special train to Haifa and by special steamer, for everything was always monotonously " special," we wended our way to Luxor. Thence by train we went to Cairo, the great city of Islam with the most cosmopolitan population in the world and the tombs of bygone kings to halt the traveller in his stride and make him ponder on the eternal mysteries of antiquity.

The King of Egypt, the late King Fuad, sent his Lord Chamberlain to the station to meet us . . . the smooth, courteous, renowned explorer, Hussanien Bey, from whom the present King Farouk, then a merry little boy, has learned much of his Western lore. The Prime Minister, Ziwar Pasha,

enormously fat and jolly, greeted us and we emerged from the police-girt station to our motor car.

Our progress to the Residency was more speedy than triumphant. Lord Allenby, mindful of the fate of the former Governor-General, had given orders that our chauffeur must never pause for an instant. Behind our car rattled a lorry packed with detectives, bristling with armaments . . . in front of us was an enormous armoured car concealing watchful soldiers . . .

Immediately behind us, to the right and to the left, were armed motor cyclists who began hooting their horns the moment we set off and made the streets of Cairo ring with their clamour.

At sixty miles an hour we tore along through the crowded thoroughfares. We ignored every traffic rule . . . people scattered to the pavements. And I, sitting beside Archer in the back seat, clutched my revolver, praying that I should never be called upon to use it. On we rushed . . . our driver was a miracle of efficiency . . . and were brought up dead by a level crossing.

Instantly the detectives leaped out of the lorry, soldiers sprang from the armoured car, the motor cyclists produced revolvers from nowhere. We were immediately surrounded. The air rang with imprecations and instructions. The train, unconscious of the commotion it was causing, chugged sedately past the crossing. The gates opened. Our army of protectors resumed their perches and we clicked into sixty once again. With a final

screech of brakes we pulled up in front of the Residency. Troops sprang to attention, and out of our car were decanted two gratified, but bewildered mortals.

I happened to notice zig-zag marks across the paint of the door of the car and questioned our charioteer, he who had added wings to the handsome Rolls-Royce. He sat wiping his brow. He was an Englishman.

" Is this your own car ? " I asked.

He replied that it was the car which belonged to the late Sir Lee Stack.

" Was this the car in which he was assassinated ? " I asked with goggling eyes.

" Yes, Sir," came the answer. " And I was his chauffeur."

" No wonder you drive like Jehu," I said.

" No wonder, Sir," he replied primly and relapsed into silence.

We stayed for five days under the Allenby roof. Naturally I was more than interested to be the guest of such a famous warrior. He was a man of few words . . . of almost apopleptic silences . . . burly, aloof, of vital dignity and pride of carriage. His principal mode of greeting to me each morning was a low rumble as if he were determined to live up to his nickname of The Bull. Not till one day when I met him in the garden alone did he speak an entire sentence to me. He was fondling his marabou stork which he loved with an abiding love. He would throw tennis balls to it, at which it would peck with its beak and make funny squawky

SIR GEOFFREY ARCHER AND MYSELF IN CAIRO IN THE CAR IN WHICH HIS PREDECESSOR—SIR LEE STACK, SIRDAR OF EGYPT, WAS ASSASSINATED: WITH THE SAME CHAUFFEUR.

*To face p.* 208.

sounds to the intense delight of the captor of Jerusalem. . . . He asked me what I thought of Egypt but did not wait for my answer. His pet was craning for another tennis ball.

My memories of Lady Allenby are of a gracious lady, quiet and self-possessed . . . intensely proud of her husband and his rise to world-fame and success. Wherever he went, she followed him with gentle eyes and smiled to herself as a mother smiles on her child to see venerable officials, commanding officers and Egyptian ministers giving at the knees in " the presence." Lord Allenby was blissfully unaware of the inferiority complex he gave to all and sundry. He won the allegiance of my Chief from the first moment. Had Lord Allenby remained longer as High Commissioner, a chapter in one life would have ended differently. Perhaps in two.

He trusted Archer . . . and with great tact conveyed that it was he and not the High Commissioner who was in charge of the Sudan. I doubt whether they talked much business together, though at times I could hear the Allenby boom reverberating from the study in this singularly hideous and entirely ill-equipped house. They understood one another. Two men of a kind in diverse ways.

Cairo was hot and mosquito-ridden. There was nothing for me to do, except to go with Archer wherever he went. Like Niobe, I was all tears. For it is impossible to buy carpets in a bazaar when outside the shop are posses of armed police and the shop-owner expects to be arrested at any second.

We were continually hurried on. "It is not safe," we were told.

In the end my Chief grew impatient. He went with me to the bazaars one day alone, dressed in plain clothes. This deed of daring completely disorganised the police system of Cairo . . . threw the Residency into a turmoil and Lord Allenby into a raging temper, and brought to us the Chief of Police, the suave, beautifully dressed Russell Pasha, recently knighted for his campaign against the drug traffic, to inform us that we must never, never do such a thing again.

My Chief was a prisoner in a city of adventure. But I was not. One night the Councillor at the Embassy, Archie Clerk Kerr . . . now Sir Archibald Clerk Kerr, Ambassador to China, suggested that he would show me the sights.

Clerk Kerr is a singularly able, disconcerting and slightly sinister figure. He had a way of cutting important people dead which made him unpopular, and he spoke his mind on all and every occasion with quiet and biting sarcasm. He is Oriental in manner and philosophy. Few people understood him. He never cared whom he offended and always wore a twisted, playful smile, as of one who looked on his fellow mortals and found the majority of them excessively stupid, boring and highly unnecessary.

I liked him immensely. He found me amusing and a trifle too easily shocked. Which is why he found me amusing.

It is not usual for the Councillor to His Majesty's

High Commissioner to escort a Governor-General's Aide de Camp round the murky " sights " of what is surely one of the most licentious cities in the world, with the possible exception of Singapore and London. But Clerk Kerr was an unusual person.

Dressed in old clothes, we sped out of the Residency one night, avoiding the British sentries at the gate. Midnight it was . . . In such a night as this Thisbe would have done more than fearfully o'ertrip the dew.

The prostitutional quarter of Cairo is long, straggling and menacing. The cobbled streets narrow every hundred yards . . . and we had to pick our way over refuse and smelly drains. The evil little houses were brightly lit as if flaunting their wares to the stars. On every doorstep sat blowsy women playing cards, who cocked carmined eyes at us and shrugged their shoulders as we shook our heads and passed on. I began to lag behind. My companion, with his twisted smile, urged me on. He meant to complete my education that night . . . at all costs. I heard him laughing gently to himself.

It must be confessed that I found singularly little pleasure in watching the excesses and peculiar, salacious dances of hired performers. The more involved and well-thought-out the entertainment became, the more bored I grew. My guide, philosopher and friend had a habit of taking out a cigarette, lighting it, and drawling, in perfect Arabic, to the infuriated artists, " Is that all ? " They were not accustomed to so blasé an audience.

I began to feel more bored. More uncomfortable and more physically ill in turns. When, like a pop from a champagne cork, all the lights went out. The streets and the houses were in darkness.

The performers rested from their labours and suggested that the entertainment should continue by candlelight at specially increased rates. We decided to go home.

The streets were mournfully gloomy. Our only light was the occasional flicker of a candle from a top room. We stumbled on and ran full-tilt into an Egyptian policeman who peered into our faces.

"Come on," whispered Archie, "he mustn't recognise me. Let's run."

So we ran. And we ran like mad. The running steps of our pursuer echoed behind us. The Egyptian police are not lightly shaken off. But his steps grew fainter and fainter and at last we emerged, panting, into the lights of Cairo proper. Not that there is such a thing.

We parted opposite Shepheard's Hotel, and I went back to the Residency. I was challenged by the sentry, allowed through with a knowing wink and reached my room to sink beneath my mosquito net which, like most of the Residency linen, was nothing but gaping holes.

The following night I attended my Chief to a Banquet given by King Fuad at the Abdin Palace. We ate off gold plate, nineteen courses were served, and a crimson and scarlet servant stood behind every chair. An orchestra played discreetly in the distance in the gold and white feast chamber, and

the King, blazoned with orders, loomed fat and serene at the end of the glittering, overladen, " over-produced " table.

Slowly the left eye of the Councillor to the High Commissioner caught mine—closed and re-opened.

Last night in Babylon : next night in Rome.

Next night—— ?

## CHAPTER NINE

GLAMOUR! Poor, overworked word. Tacked on to a sunset—a film star—a bathing belle, it grows shoddy.

Wherein lies the much-vaunted glamour of the East? It is not immediately apparent. I trust I am not shattering an illusion.

Does it lie in its mystery . . . that mystery which in modern days is more popularly supposed to cling to the person of Miss Greta Garbo? . . . in its blue skies, its peoples, its broiling suns, not forgetting its sunsets which are so vivid that they appear ridiculously artificial?

The Near East, be it said, owes much of its glamour to the guide books, those colourful tomes —profusely over-illustrated—written by men with facile pens and more facile imagination, to the ultimate glory of Mr. Thomas Cook. Mr. Cook wisely does not tell the sun-starved worker . . . catching the eight-fifteen to the city daily in pouring rain, that the most pungent claim of the East to immortality lies in its smells . . . the smell of fœtid and narrow streets, of unwashed humanity, of dead dogs and open drains.

Nor does the beckoning and soft-tongued Dragoman of the East warn the traveller of the awful monotony of burning skies and remorseless suns,

and of the multitudinous bugs which spring upon the enraptured traveller and infect him with dysentery, malaria, black-water fever, jaundice and sleeping sickness, all these with hilarious abandon.

Drink of the Waters of the Nile, goes the adage, and you will ever return. Drink of the waters of that softly-flowing river and you will never return . . . to anything—except to hospital and a digestion permanently ruined for life. Bathe your toes by all means in the cool waters, but keep a bottle of mineral water in your knapsack and a cap-opener ready to hand.

Here is not glamour. Here is danger, enfeebled health and death. Here are climates which are not meant for the white man and his wife—climates which can best be withstood only with the timely aid of a medical dictionary, tropical men of medicine and a capacity for swallowing and retaining quinine in large doses.

And yet I would return if I could, even though malaria has coursed through my veins, not once nor twice, but many times, and I lay raving for two nights with sunstroke . . . that glorious benison of the Sun of the East which catches the unprotected neck unawares.

The true glamour of the East is to be found in its silences and in its unearthly air of resignation. In the peace of its nights, bewildering colour and the ever-changing, unchanging moods of its peoples. . . . Above all, maybe, in its utter surrender to Time.

The child of the Sun does not hurry or put his

best foot forward. In the fullness of time he is born. In the fullness of time he will die, and the manner of his demise is of no consequence to him. All is as the Will of Allah directs. To question the Will and Immutable Purpose of His God is neither wise nor courteous, and the courtesy of the Eastern folk is deep and inborn. Should a man be born to riches and high estate, to the command of many servants and the soft ease of rich food and silken raiment, he is not inwardly aware that he is more blessed of God than are the fellaheen who toil in the fields and live with only one thought of future happiness . . . of the Hereafter. It is all as Allah has ordained. You do not reject the gift which your Maker brings to you. Nor do you cry aloud and cover your head with ashes if for His Own Good Reason, He should suddenly deprive you of the treasures of your houses.

The fellaheen do not rage in the market place against the comfort of the rich man's life or at the staggering beauty of his wives. Allah has directed that he shall be clad in the garments of humility, and work his salvation with unremitting labour. A shady patch out of the glare of the noonday sun, a handful of dates, a crony with whom to imbibe strong coffee when the night falls like an iron curtain over the land, and wilderness were truthfully paradise enow.

It is the philosophy of the Eastern temperament which seizes the imagination of the children of the West . . . the inner calm and acceptance of fate, the futility of ambition, the lack of soul-destroying

hurrying and worrying . . . the conviction that to-morrow the sun will be shining . . . the glowing beatitude of abnegation of silly unimportant human hopes and fears.

These are the waters of which we drink when we travel afar to the lands of the setting sun. Waters which refresh our weary, overburdened minds and inspire us with new awareness of our own littleness in the scheme of things.

Seek out an Arab, an Egyptian, a Somali . . . any true follower of the Prophet, and pour out into his patient ear your tribulations, miseries and disappointments. He will attend you with silent courtesy, regarding you with an all-comprehending gaze, the tenderness of a father towards a nerve-ridden and foolish child. When you have done, he will offer you the consolation of his Faith. It is the only consolation he knows, for has it not sustained himself, his fathers and forefathers in the hour of affliction from generation to generation? "Imshallah Bukra," he will say . . . that and no other. . . . "Please God, To-morrow."

He recommends you to the Care of God. To him that is all-sufficient. He has done his good deed for the day . . . for that and every day. For so it is written and so it must ever be . . . the eternal, unchanging Truth.

We of the West will turn away, stirred perhaps in one corner of our being, but unconvinced. We find small comfort here, for our teachings and our education, and the whirling madness in which we exist, have left us no time in which to absorb such

philosophies. Fretful, impatient of ourselves and determined to psycho-analyse our God on every occasion, we know that the advice of our friend under the date tree is sound. But we cannot accept it. We do not know the way.

The God of the West is becoming more of a Sunday God, a God of Sunday-go-to-meeting—best suits, dreary church services and roast beef for lunch. On Monday all will be forgotten, with a sigh of relief, a sigh embracing God and the roast beef . . . till next week. The God of the East is a God of every day, and of all day. He is there with the rising of the Sun. He is still there when the Sun sinks a crimson ball down over the horizon . . . about one's path and about one's bed.

To me herein lies the glamour—not in the crowded bazaars, in the veiled women with the glowing eyes, in the golden expanse of the desert nor in the flashing of milk-white teeth in a brown face—but in this inward serenity of a mind which does not attempt to solve the puzzle of existence. It is conscious of no puzzle to solve. It asks no questions. It gives no answers.

Allah is All-Knowing . . . All Wise. Allah knows His Business. To-day may be evil and troublesome. What of it? Imshallah Bukra.

On our way back to Khartoum down the Nile to Halfa, for long the southern frontier post of Egypt, where we took the railway back to Khartoum, I sensed the full appeal of the River Nile, and gave myself frankly up to its spell. It is as well I did not realise that in a very short while I was due to hover

fitfully between life and death by its banks and find nothing in its imperturbability but depression and desolation.

Our shiny white ship . . . the *Isis* again . . . demurely took us under its unhurried care, stopping at Siboo, Arnada, Ibrim and of course at Luxor where, a trifle surprisingly, we were greeted by the principal British resident wearing a bright tartan kilt. We were taken to tea at a grand hotel which truly lives up to its advertisements and commands an " extensive view," charging us for tea a sum which would have kept any ordinary British working family in luxury for a fortnight.

I was careful to inquire after Mr. Robert Hichens. Always, when visiting Luxor, it was the thing to do, to inquire after Mr. Hichens. That distinguished novelist who has for so long turned Egyptian glamour into British pounds, shillings and pence, owns a villa near Luxor and is rightly accepted as one of the sights. Mr. Hichens was not in residence at the moment. A pity. I had a strong urge to have a peep at this officially credited keeper of the Garden of Allah . . . to whom the late Sir George Alexander, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Charles Boyer, Marlene Dietrich, the box office of the St. James's Theatre and several Hollywood chain cigar smokers owe so much.

Perhaps our friend with the kilt . . . an ex-Governor of a Sudan province . . . has frightened Mr. Hichens away. His was certainly an alarmingly vivid covering and out of place in so exotic a garden.

The sun was dangerously near its most fascinating

trick . . . when it begins to swell like a scarlet balloon preparatory to bursting with a pop into the Nile. We tied up at Abu Simbel. The stars were showing their brilliant bejewelled heads and the river had turned a dazzling blue. From right and left of us came the creak—creak of the water wells . . . and the cries of the fellaheen urging their cattle unceasingly round in circles as they drew up bucket after bucket out of the river. The song of these water drawers, soft and monotonous with a curious, despairing rise and fall in key, made a perfect overture to the scene which met our eyes.

Rising high into the sky were the vast Rock Temples of Abu Simbel. For centuries covered by the friendly sand till in 1869 they were cleared to the view of uncomprehending man. More than sixty feet in height, carved out of the solid rock, overlooking the Nile, they stand unparalleled tribute to the architecture of immemorial days.

The four Colossi of King Rameses of Egypt loom immense out of their fastness . . . sitting with enormous arms resting regally on gigantic knees, keeping their eternal watch. Our party, like tiny ants, trudged through the thick, brown sand and stood silent. For me all our pomp and ceremony, all our gay uniforms and occasions of State, fell away. Nothing remained but the law of things as they are. For one instant I was as one with the philosophy of the East and was entirely satisfied and entirely happy. For a second—no more . . . giving me the passport to content. A cough at my

side and my passport was whisked away—cancelled —never to be recaptured.

Within the mighty tomb are halls where are seated other giant figures, grotesquely mutilated. An altar . . . witness of unthinkable rites and appeasing sacrifices, stared dully out of the darkness. Once and once only in the twenty-four hours does the light of day reach this unholy " Holy of Holies " . . . when the sun rises over the Red Sea Hills.

We emerged into blackness . . . but the heavens were gay with stars and the moon threw patterns on the sand. The helmsman of the *Isis*, with a sense of showmanship which would have done credit to a Cochran, turned towards us a searchlight lamp, throwing an amber beam. The four watching gods leaped startingly into the soft light . . . looking far away over our puny heads into the Nile whose waters danced in the amber haze like a liquid rainbow.

Wonderful . . . unforgettable . . . glamorous Nile.

. . . . . .

Damnable, treacherous, suffocating Nile.

Soon after our return to the Sudan, we set off on a tour. Khartoum was unbearably hot and there was much to be done in the far districts of the country.

Our course was set for Kordofan, a weary distance . . . and then to El Obeid, the headquarters of the Camel Corps. This Corps, steeped in tradition of service, staffed by British officers,

setting out across the desert wastes to quell a disturbance here . . . to parley with a desert Sheik there. For ever on the move . . . riding by day and watering and resting their steeds by night.

The Camel Corps, a miracle of smartness, turned out to meet us. The Sheiks and their followers for miles around had come in to do us honour. Four hundred Arab horsemen waited in battle array. Followed camel charges. The riders urged their ungainly beasts at incredible speed to within twenty yards of where we stood . . . then by consummate camelship . . . I know no more fitting word . . . swerved to right and left of us, thundering on, sending up clouds of dust and sand. Next was staged a camel race . . . with the riders standing on their camels' backs and streaking past, yelling and screaming.

In common with most of my race, I have a great love for animals. But it is not possible to love a camel. It is an unwieldy, treacherous creature, surely conceived in a moment of intense panic . . . of little form or shape, graceless, hideous, evil of temper. Its master, tend he his charge never so carefully and well, is to a camel nothing but a scourge and an infliction.

While it is being fed its wicked eyes burn with hate and fury. Its slobbering lips draw back from its slimy gums, ready to bite, and to inflict terrible wounds, to fester and grow gangrene. The most unpleasant habit of this unpleasant beast of the desert is suddenly, and with no fair warning, to emit a green, balloon-shaped mass out of the

corner of its mouth. The balloon swells and wobbles. And then subsides within the slavering mouth. In this extraordinary fashion, which is as obscene as it is insulting, the camel gives the camel " raspberry " to all mankind. Sickening, revolting creature . . . loping over the desert . . . going without water for days . . . a scraggy, humpy, abortion of nature.

The camel is the Devil's steed of a surety. . . . No glamour surrounds a camel. It smells to glory. Did not the Prophet Mohammed rule that " Verily in the hump of a camel rests Satan the stoned " ?

Our maps took us into the Nubia Mountains . . . on foot and by car. The hills raise their heads over the plains and valleys, and shut out every particle of air. The white officials, condemned to such a purgatory, grow pale and wan and ashen of complexion. The country is bare and hideous and the natives are poor and ill-favoured. Wearily, we made our way to the Blue Nile, there to halt before plunging back into this ghastly land. And by the waters of the Blue Nile I lay me down and nearly died.

Hundreds of miles from Khartoum . . . in desolate country . . . cut off from succour except from the Nile steamers which only pass once every week . . . in a spot infested with mosquitoes and in a temperature of one hundred and ten in the shade, I gasped on my mattress. I could go no farther. I could not walk or move. Some virulent fever had me in its grip. Every half an hour I was sick and I shivered from head to foot.

Archer was anxious. He and his entourage conferred darkly and came and stood by my side —helpless. It was not malaria, a disease I had had and one easily shaken off by aspirin and quinine. Unless I could get to medical aid—or medical aid to me—I would die. There was no doubt about it in their minds. In my mind . . . feeble and alternating between unconsciousness and pain, there was no doubt. Whatever. I did not greatly care . . . I became weaker and asked only to be left in peace to pass into a rest where there would be no beating sun, no more pain, and no more agonising knife thrusts in my head.

Archer had to go on. It was his duty and he was bound to leave me behind. A native runner was sent to the nearest telegraph outpost . . . an interminable distance away . . . ordering the Government Hospital Ship to come up from Khartoum, to steam at full speed day and night. Nothing more could be done.

I watched my party go. With my servant to look after me and two Askaris to keep guard, I was left alone. My tent was pitched by the Nile bank where I looked over the water and heard the lap, lap of the ripples against the reeds. I could not eat or raise my head . . . slowly I turned a brighter and brighter yellow and my cheeks grew caverns and my skin fell almost visibly off my bones.

One hundred and two . . . one hundred and four . . . one hundred and five in the shade . . . no escape from the merciless heat. Where, in the name of God was that Hospital Ship?

At last she arrived, gleaming and efficient . . . with doctor and nurse aboard and soft-footed ward attendants trained in the hospital at Khartoum. I was the only passenger. Lifted from my tent I was carried into a perfectly appointed ward . . . tucked into soft white sheets. A fan whirred near by and cubes of ice were to my hand. With a sigh I turned on my side. And the rhythm of the engines and the hum-hum of the dynamos told me that we were leaving the scenes of my ordeal. I slept.

Back to Khartoum . . . looking so ill that my Chief gasped with horror when he visited me in the hospital on his return . . . weary days and nights of convalescence . . . skilled care and attention by the doctors and nurses, and a certain knowledge that never again would I be really fit and well.

So it proved. My interior workings were all to hell. And to hell they have remained. I tire easily and no one knows with what a struggle I sometimes go about my business. Nine years after, in London, the germs were to burst forth again and put me to bed for six months . . . with doctors and Harley Street specialists shaking their expensive heads over me and doubting my recovery, at a guinea a minute. All were confounded.

I still live . . . and am thankful again to have "cocked a snook" at Death . . . with whom by now I am on a nodding acquaintance and of whom I stand in no fear.

The hospital at Khartoum pronounced me fit for light duty. I returned to the Palace, to a duty that could never be light. To a Chief who needed all

the friendly help he could have. The climate was telling on him and critics encompassed him round about.

One day he suggested I should go home, to England. I refused. It was written in the stars that we should go home to England together . . . not long now. I knew it. And never return. I had always known it . . . inside me . . . but I kept my own counsel.

Meanwhile there was this little matter of the new Sudan Defence Force. The break-away from Egypt and the Egyptian Army had come . . . in our time. And with it what is described in official communiqués as " a situation." For the Army in the Sudan was to be reformed as a British Force . . . and the title of Sirdar was henceforth to be dropped from the title of Governor-General of the Sudan. Not that he cared. He was a civilian, anyway.

The pressing problem was the problem of the Sudan native officers. They had taken their oaths to Egypt. Would they, as strict Mohammedans, change over? The Mohammedan does not take oaths lightly. His word under such conditions is considerably more binding, to him, than is our Marriage Service to some modern participants. Not that that is saying a vast deal.

Days of tension followed. General Huddleston, who was Commander-in-Chief of all the Sudan troops and the Camel Corps, brought his personality and tact into play. Neither were lightly to be dismissed.

The General was one of the quietest men I have met . . . so quiet that it was only with great difficulty I could hear what he said. But he was a magnificent soldier and everyone loved him. The natives not only loved him but held him in awe. His name was a synonym for bravery. On one occasion, when faced with a mutinous battalion, he had gone into the midst of them, armed with a walking stick and had asked them what the blazes they thought they were playing at. A show of bravery impresses the Easterners as deeply as it impresses the not so easily impressed Westerner.

The crisis, as is the way with crises, passed. Everything was set for the great day of the change over. I awoke one morning to find myself with the rank of Bimbashi, equivalent to a Major in the British Army, and not particularly gratified, except that it carried with it a rise in pay.

Colonel Kenny seemed peeved at my promotion, which he considered was singularly undeserved. He had to put up with it, as it was not politic for me to be the only officer with British Army rank in the whole of the Sudan.

In great style, in a vast tent in Omdurman—which these days is linked by a bridge to Khartoum—close by the scenes of the homeric victory of Kitchener over the Mahdi and one of the most appalling battles in history, Archer handed out commissions to the British and Native officers . . . of the Sudan Defence Force.

The occasion is noteworthy if only that . . . though I stand open, as ever, to instant correction,

it was the only time when anyone other than the King had given commissions to British Officers. The commissions were signed by Archer as Governor General, direct from him. Alone he did it.

My commission, exquisitely traced on parchment paper, reposes in a black box which I keep under my bed. Now and then I drag it out and look at it, resolved that once a Bimbashi always a Bimbashi shall ever be my motto.

The days wore on. Memory recalls function succeeding function ; a poisonously fat and overfed member of Council who told Archer that I was the most incompetent A.D.C. the Sudan had ever suffered—this because I had refused to pollute the Palace with his presence unless absolutely necessary . . . tennis parties . . . (my Chief and I were tennis fiends) . . . dark glances from Kenny . . . intrigues, political and from within the Palace " crowd " . . . a visit to Suakin, a wonderful old native town on the Red Sea, sweltering in the dampest heat . . . Bardsley succeeded by one Springfield, a keen, bird-like creature . . . duck-shooting expeditions . . . and talks with the cool and icy but enchanting Macmichael. And Sterry growing more and more disapproving, and Schuster increasingly immaculate and super-efficient.

Suddenly at the end of 1925 we were sent into a fever of excitement, organising, disorganising and anticipating by the imminent arrival at Khartoum of the then Duke and Duchess of York and their Staff.

The Duke and Duchess were to stay with us at

the Palace for some days . . . coming on their way back to England on their East African Tour, through the Sudan, to Egypt and then home.

At such times as these the Staff of a Governor, especially his A.D.C., is taxed to the limit of endurance. Dinner parties, banquets, garden parties have to be arranged, suitable accommodation fixed up . . . whole days' itinerary mapped out . . . visits to local sights and hospitals, troops . . . receptions . . . arrival and departure ceremonials . . . motor cars . . . servants. Naturally the rush to be included in the first dinner party given at the Palace to the visiting royalties was fearsome and intense. The fate of countless social snobs lay in my hands. Kenny would put down names and I would cross them out. Though I was bound by usage and custom strictly to follow the order of precedence in issuing invitations, I was always careful to use my discretion . . . a discretion of which no one else was aware, perfectly certain that no A.D.C. dare depart from the letter of the law.

But I made my own rules and followed them whenever I could . . . in India, Africa and the Sudan. Snobs I detest, and in all my posts I had had my fill of them. I made up my mind that so far as lay in my power I would keep them away from the summit of their ambition, the Governor's table. They could make room for other and worthier citizens.

I had not been long in the Sudan before I became well conscious of the officials . . . and their wives

. . . who were trying to undermine my Chief's prestige. They resented so young a man being appointed to so big a job ; they wanted to rule their own dunghill. They chattered and gossiped. Archer in so many ways the simplest of souls and with a boyish trust in mankind, suffered these people gladly . . . entertained them and would hear no word against them. I spoke no word against them. I knew my man.

But I had my own informants and my own eye for a humbug and an intriguer, which is considerable, thank God. My job gave me opportunities in legion to judge human character . . . and as human beings interest me enormously, I cultivated my opportunities. They would come in useful in after life, I felt. They did.

Thus some of the high and mighty found it increasingly difficult to get to the Palace. The royal visit was my heaven-sent opportunity to show these folk that I would do all to prevent them, these time-servers, from having the advantage of entry to the Palace and still be permitted to sow dissension against the Governor-General the moment they had finished the savoury.

Khartoum waited on tip-toe for the Duke and Duchess. We were all ready for them on the appointed date, Archer frankly nervous, for he was more of a bluff, open-air man than a courtier. Word came that the party would be a day late. The Duke had shot his elephant in Uganda, under the expert guidance of my old friend Samarki, and he had taken to the safari life of Africa with

enthusiasm. He was not hurrying down to Khartoum, to Guards of Honour and all the business of royalty on a visit. He drew out his safari days as long as he could. . . . The informality of it all . . . the open-necked shirt and the khaki shorts . . . and grand sleeps on a camp bed after a hard day's trek were much more to the mark.

To royalty hedged about with stiff duty, this life must of necessity appeal. Of course this delayed action did cause the utmost inconvenience to a great many officials for some hundreds of miles. Their plans were cut and dried . . . for the royal party. It must ever be so. One cancelled engagement may upset an entire time-table. My Chief, realising that the Duke was lingering in the wilds till the last moment, gained confidence. He would talk to him about shooting. And once he got on that subject there were few men as informative or as entertaining.

Duty had to be served. The Duke and Duchess arrived by our special train to a beflagged Khartoum. They had with them Lieutenant-Commander Colin Buist as Equerry, Captain (now Admiral) Sir Basil Brooke, a delightful man, as Comptroller, and Lady Annaly, Lady-in-Waiting to the Duchess.

The Duke, a slight, shy figure in white, with medals on his tunic and the blue ribbon of the Garter slung across his chest, looked tanned but weary and rather thin. He did not smile, but shook hands with us all with a grave look. He struck me as being unsure of himself. The Duchess

looked, and was, enchanting . . . slighter of build than she is now but with that same flashing smile and rose-leaf complexion. She really and genuinely won our hearts right from the first.

When we arrived at the Palace from the station, I escorted the Duke and Duchess to their suite. The Duke walked across the room and threw open the windows with an impatient gesture. He said to me, "Oh, but it *IS* hot." During his whole stay he found the heat irksome. It got on his nerves and irritated him sometimes beyond endurance.

I recall that one day, to my utter confusion, the Duke spoke to me sharply. It was meet and proper that he, as the King's son, should have his own royal standard on his motor car whenever he went out, even for a non-ceremonial drive. One afternoon he and the Duchess had entered the car at the Palace gates and I was there seeing them off. As he caught sight of the flag on the bonnet of his car, the Duke was seized with sudden anger and impatiently exclaimed to me "Take that flag off my car at once." I was dumbfounded. His command embarrassed me, and in my quandary I must have turned crimson with confusion. And then something occurred which I shall never forget.

The Duchess, with a glance at me which took in my distress in a flash, leaned from her seat towards me and with a reassuring smile said, "We quite understand that you are in no fault in putting the flag on the motor, but we like to go out privately whenever possible. But do not bother now."

VISIT OF THE (THEN) DUKE AND DUCHESS OF YORK TO THE SUDAN, 1925—GROUP TAKEN AT THE PALACE, KHARTOUM.

*Front Row* (*left to right*)—Roy Bardsley, The Duke, Sir Geoffrey Archer, The Duchess, Sir Archibald Clerk Kerr. *Back Row* (*left to right*)—Lionel Springfield, Admiral Sir Basil Brooke, Self, Lady Annally, Lt.-Commander Colin Buist, Colonel Kenny.

I shall never cease to remember with pleasure and gratitude the two long talks I had with the Duchess. We sat in a corner of the Terrace after dinner; a non-banquet evening for a merciful change . . . and chatted freely like two natural people. We were both young. I told her of my aeroplane crash and of all that had come after. And she asked me about my work and what I was going to do in the future. She gave me great heart, and did more good than she knew to a puzzled and overtired young man.

The Duke was invariably kind and courteous to me, and both of them were delightful to Archer. They liked him. I knew that. For myself, though the Duke would chat to me for a few minutes or so and pass many a whispered remark to me at a function, I know he never felt at his ease with me.

I realise that what I have inferred may sound extraordinary, a little impertinent perhaps. It is not meant to be. I longed for the Duke to have a long talk with me but he would not. And yet I feel, and this I shall feel till my dying day, I might have been of use to him. For he stammered, and I stammered. Our hesitations were identical . . . what was agony to him was agony to me . . . and his case, by virtue of his destiny, was worse than mine. No one but the Duchess would dare to talk to him about his speech problem, and no one understood his nervousness and his pluck more than I did. But I never had the privilege of a real conversation with him. He knew that I stammered . . . I had told the Duchess how it had come about, and

maybe it was that fact which made him not wish to embarrass me.

The Duke is now our King . . . the Duchess, our Queen. They came to their high estate in a time of unexampled anxiety, when a Nation was in anguish, touched and stricken to the heart. . . . They made their courageous decision . . . knowing that the Empire expected it of them . . . and in an incredibly short time both they and their children, who were not born in the Khartoum days, have earned our gratitude, affection and admiration.

When the King accepted the Throne, people said in every village and town in the land that it must be terrible for him to take on such a position, not only in such painful circumstances but albeit—totally unprepared and bewildered. I listened to them all without saying anything. It was a terrible decision to take, but not one person in five million really knew how terrible it was. I did.

I hope I shall be accused of no disrespect when I record that never in all my life have I seen such a change in a human being as I have seen in our present King. Indeed, it is the highest tribute I could pay. He is not the same person to-day who flung open those windows that boiling day in the Palace at Khartoum. Then he was thin, nervy, impatient, bored, and lacking in confidence. He got through his duties owing to determination and power of will. Which even then called forth admiration. But to-day he is sure of himself, gracious, calm and dignified. He is a personality on his own, apart from the dignity which auto-

matically hovers about a King. His voice is clear and strong, his stammer practically cured, his smile ever ready and generous and his manner upright and just.

His eyes prove this wonder for all the world to see. Here is a man, still young, who by mere strength of will, by almost superhuman self-control, has overcome handicaps, every one of which would have taxed the strongest man. His eyes hold a light they had never held before. They gaze direct with a tender and searching kindliness . . . reflecting the soul of a man who has found inward peace after a homeric struggle . . . the soul of a man who has found his reward in that at last he is needed—and loved.

I search for words in which adequately to express my admiration of him. Whenever I hear his voice coming over the radio I sit silent and deeply moved. Let all who are inclined to say that our King, though good and God-fearing, is a man of shadowy personality, ponder on the thoughts which throng my brain whenever I see him, or hear him.

Here is a man who all his life had had to take third place. Third place to his father, second place to his brother Edward. Whenever some dull, disagreeable duty had to be performed, it was always "Send Bertie." And our present King went and did his duty, knowing that he was deputising for the glamorous personality of his elder brother.

Without warning . . . without preparation, he was called upon to mount the throne of Great

Britain and the lands beyond the sea . . . and with him day and night was his failing of speech.

As King he would have to become the cynosure of every eye . . . to make speeches and be everlastingly on show. His words when broadcast would reach the ears of countless millions, each and everyone hanging on his every inflection—his every pause. In the blaze of the limelight he was destined to live and in the limelight was destined to die.

Here was enough to frighten the boldest character, enough to make any man say, " No. I cannot "—even to a throne.

The King said, " Yes." No one who did not know what a stammer, even though slight, can mean to a sensitive man, could have known the torture of those first speeches in public. But I did. The strain must have sapped his energies and left him gasping mentally and physically. But he went on. When it was first suggested he should broadcast, he could easily have refused, for a score of reasons. But he did not refuse. He nerved himself for the ordeal and emerged triumphant. From success to success he has gone, and here lies the answer to the riddle asked by all and sundry, " What has caused this amazing change in the King ? " The answer is—suffering of mind and body, disappointments and set-backs, an iron determination to fit himself in every fashion for kingship. He has found himself.

With loyalty, deep sincerity and reverence, I say that this is one of the most wonderful things I have known. Our King's triumph as the years succeed

the years, will inspire all those who are faint of heart, who are inclined to fall by the way, to give up what seems an impossible struggle.

And the Queen? To this day and hour I think of her as I saw her outside the Palace at Khartoum that day twelve years ago. I see her turning to her husband with a smile, a whispered word. The sight of a loving and understanding hand spread for a fleeting instant on his knee, traces its path across my mind. She was then by the side of the Duke—so now she is by the side of the King. Her eyes never waver from his; her strength still sustains him and comforts him. I do not talk of any mystery, any strange phenomenon. It is there for all the world to see whenever the King and Queen appear in public.

Our country is fortunate in her King and in her Queen. How fortunate perhaps we shall never fully realise.

. . . . . .

I only once had the honour of talking to the Queen after I came back from Khartoum. She was still the Duchess of York. It was at a dance at Lady Massereene and Ferrard's house in Lancaster Gate and I, without a partner, was standing by the ball-room doorway watching the dancers. The Duke and Duchess passed dancing together. And as they came by me the Duchess looked up and saw me. She whispered to her partner and stopped dancing. She came over to me holding out her hand. The Duke followed and charmingly recalled me to mind. I bowed. And, flushed with pleasure—and

made so bold as to ask the Duchess for the honour of the next dance. Contrary, I am given to believe, to all etiquette.

The Duchess glanced at her programme. It was full. "You shall have the next dance," she said. And they both took the floor again.

We sat out our dance after two turns round the crowded floor. I said to her, with some boldness, "Could we find some quiet place where we can talk?" A convenient stair was found. Here we sat and talked and talked. The music of the next dance struck up. My partner made no move. It was not my place to rise. The Duchess remembered all about Khartoum and laughed with me at some of the funny people we had met. And then she said—"What are you going to do in the future?"

"I do not know, Ma'am," I replied. "I am rather afraid of the future."

And then she said with a soft smile, "You will have a struggle whatever you do. Yes. I feel that. But you will come through. I would not be afraid if I were you."

At that moment the Duke came up, having searched the house for his wife. His eyes lit up when he found her. It was obvious he was never happy when she was out of his sight.

I sprang to my feet. I was bidden a royal and gracious good-night.

Time moves on its inexorable way and God fulfils Himself in many ways. We hang like little dancing lights that eddy in the sunshine and are gone. Little remains to most of us but our memories.

For myself, when I stand in a crowd to " See the King and Queen " go by and cheer and wave my hand with the rest, it is nothing to me that now they would not remember me if they saw me. That their high estate puts them forever out of reach. There only remains for me the pride that I have been privileged to meet and to talk with two such remarkable people . . . the remembrance of a smile—a word of cheer—in a dark hour . . . of a young man who has led Fate by the ear.

God Save The King ! Yes, of course. But the King has saved himself.

KING GEORGE VI., WITH THE ELEPHANT HE SHOT IN UGANDA, WHEN DUKE OF YORK, ON HIS EAST AFRICAN TOUR.

[*To face p.* 240.

## CHAPTER TEN

MY Eastern days were fated soon to end and I was to stumble on another sign-post and change my manner of life, my way and certainly my means. Nineteen hundred and twenty-six . . . a fateful year for Sir Geoffrey Archer, a fateful year for me. Though we knew it not. But very soon now my strange feeling of foreboding, which had never left me since we had bidden farewell to Uganda, was to prove itself. Earlier than I had anticipated.

We went back to England for two months' leave, by way of Palestine and Syria. Lord Allenby had resigned and had shaken the dust of Egypt from his feet, and we waited for tidings of his successor. The news soon came, and the Egyptian newspapers splashed great black headings with the words "Lord Lloyd to be High Commissioner of Egypt and the Sudan."

So we were to meet again after all these years, he and I. The Sir George Lloyd I had known had become the Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, plastered with decorations, and had grown into a force in the Councils of Empire. Egypt needed a strong man. And he came. With trouble in his train.

As I expected, Lord Lloyd lost little time in making it perfectly clear that his title of "High

Commissioner of Egypt and of the Sudan" were not empty words. The Sudan was all part of the Lloyd lucky dip and the Sudan should know it . . . and so should its Governor-General. Allenby had been content to allow the Sudan to be run by its man on the spot, with an occasional word of advice from the Residency. Not so Lloyd. All this was inevitable, seeing the character of the new man in command. Unfortunately the Sudan, its problems and its history were matters of keen interest to Lloyd and he was burning to take a hand in the game.

Archer, who was a fair man in the highest sense, praised the appointment of Lloyd. His admiration for him had always been great, for with Lawrence of Arabia, one of Lloyd's closest friends, he was steeped in Orientalism. But I knew that Archer was uneasy. With Allenby he had been happy. How would he fare with Lloyd?—the mortal with a load of mischief.

We were not long left in doubt. Where before decisions of policy and finance had been settled by the Governor-General in Council, they now had to be approved by the High Commissioner. The cable wires hummed with instructions from the Residency . . . suggesting alterations and amendments. The Private Secretaries at Khartoum were kept busy day and night coding and deciphering. The voice of Lloyd was heard in the land, and it was a voice which carried over the "wide, open spaces."

It appeared that we were in for a gingering-up

process. Bombay had long since been gingered-up. Egypt and the Sudan were to follow . . . and with a wry smile of reminiscence I pictured the Secretariat staff at the Residency in Cairo, bewailing the day this demoniacal live wire was born.

Archie Clerk Kerr did not remain in Cairo long after Lloyd had arrived. The Residency was much too small to hold two men with oriental minds. Kerr was succeeded as Counsellor by Mr. Nevile Henderson, now Sir Nevile, and our Ambassador to Germany.

Henderson is a finely drawn man, of studious habit and demeanour. He would listen carefully to all sides of a question and then take the side he had always intended to take. He was admirable in Cairo, not only for his ability as a diplomat, but in that he acted as a brake on too much enthusiasm and would advise caution and diplomatic methods with a deprecating shrug. The very man for Lloyd . . . loyal, knowledgeable, of impeccable family, rabid for tradition, and with a quiet authority withal. . . .

A peremptory summons came to Archer to go to Cairo. We were not asked whether it was convenient. Archer showed signs of annoyance. I brought comfort to the oppressed by saying that it was just Lloyd's little way.

It was a thousand to one that once having got Archer to Cairo, Lloyd would exert all his devastating charm of manner, with its usual devastating success.

We duly arrived at Cairo station. This time

there were not quite so many high officials to meet us as before . . . the fast car was there, but it did not travel quite as swiftly. There were fewer detectives, and where before we had four motor cyclists armed apparently to the back teeth, this time we had but two—armed only to the front teeth. Their motor cycles made just a fraction less noise than of yore and the pedestrians and street traffic appeared just a tiny fraction less impressed by our progress.

In truth the whole caboodle, an inelegant word . . . was well up to form. I chuckled the entire way to the Residency—to myself. It was all as I knew it would be. Behold, there was only one High Commissioner . . . and if he himself had an escort of four motor cyclists for his ventures abroad, then no one else should have that number—not even a Governor-General.

We were greeted at the Residency by an old friend of mine, one Sir Harry Floyd, who though seemingly lackadaisical and drawly as ever . . . this pose hiding considerable efficiency . . . struck me as being somewhat harassed. I informed Harry that I had once been on Lloyd's staff, which information brought him a strange comfort. But no immediate relief.

As I had expected, Lloyd greeted Archer with marked warmth, and Lady Lloyd, as slim, as gracious and a trifle more regal than ever. I was extremely pleased to see my old Chief once again and felt that exhilaration one usually felt in this man's presence.

During the days we were in Cairo, we were left in no doubt that Lloyd had impressed on the Egyptian Ministers that there was to be no damned nonsense. His courtesy was impeccable . . . and he and Lady Lloyd were the perfect host and hostess. But the iron hand in the velvet glove was apparent. Never shall I forget one day when the Prime Minister of Egypt called at the Residency for an important interview with the High Commissioner. It was conveyed to His Excellency in his study that the distinguished caller was dressed, not in the frock coat of ceremony, but in the natty blue suiting of informality. The Excellency in the study caused to be conveyed to the Excellency in the ante-room that blue suits . . . even of Savile Row cut . . . were all very well in their way at the right time and place. But the time and place were not now.

The caller . . . slightly more extinguished than distinguished . . . left the Residency, entered his car, drove home, changed into the apparel of ceremony, returned to the Residency and was ushered immediately into the presence of the High Commissioner. Then business of the utmost import was discussed, and at the conclusion Lord Lloyd himself escorted the Prime Minister to the door.

It is open to question whether this episode has even now been forgotten. It is one of those episodes which even an elephant would have difficulty in forgetting.

One evening Lloyd told me that he wished to go for a walk with me. The car was commanded and

we drove to the sands beyond Cairo. It is on such occasions as these that the real man was revealed. He said that at times he wondered whether this sort of life was worth while. There was no freedom . . . no relaxation. He pointed to the two armed escorts plodding along behind us, kicking up the sand.

"The English country lanes must be looking lovely now," said Lloyd. "No revolvers there. Come on. I must go back."

Back to Khartoum; ready to prepare for the visit of the High Commissioner to open the Sennar Dam . . . on January 1st.

This Dam is a wonder of craftsmanship and of British engineering, harnessing the Blue Nile as it does. From the Dam the main Gezira Canal runs for thirty miles parallel to the Blue Nile and then divides into a system of smaller canals. These refreshing streams irrigate an area of 300,000 acres in the Plain lying between the Blue and White Niles. The cotton crop receives the sustenance which nature denies it, and the cotton bursts forth in abundance, much to the gratification and faint surprise of the Government which constructed the Dam and the Canals, and of the Sudan Plantation Syndicate.

Terrific ceremony marked this Dam opening. On board our special train going down to Makwar, I remarked to my Chief that it was obvious that the future history of the Sudan was likely to be one Dam thing after another. He failed to see the joke. I do not blame him. By rights he should have been opening this Dam himself.

Our journey to the opening was marked by a father and mother of a row between Colonel Kenny and myself. Frankly I was sick of Kenny. And doubtless he was sick of me, but I chose to take exception to a remark he had passed. I was always perhaps too sensitive about such maters. Kenny then lost his temper and threatened to put me under arrest. I was pale with fury. The Dam opened under ominous skies . . . but I am willing to believe that a good time was had by almost all.

Lloyd returned to Cairo. Soon Kenny left for pastures new. Looming nearer and nearer came the heaviest blow of Archer's life.

It was the Governor-General's considered opinion that it is not well to dwell upon past mistakes and disloyalties. He was ever of the opinion that it is more politic to make friends with your one-time enemy . . . to garland him with flowers and do him honour . . . the while keeping a wary eye on his gun arm. The history of the Sudan was sufficiently bloody.

Forty years ago not a man or woman but cheered when the news came through that the Mahdi and his Dervishes had been finally defeated at the hands of Kitchener at Omdurman . . . that vast sun-scorched battlefield . . . where now rests the battered tomb of the mighty rebel and where the vultures still hover, though all is now silent.

The desert ran with blood that day. Lord Kitchener and Sir Reginald Wingate set to work to turn the Sudan from a land of savagery and desolation into a grain-producing country with

thousands of acres of crops, with the village tribesmen intent on their flocks and herds and where few political distractions are known.

The tale of Lawrence's influence with the Arabs and how he won their hearts and their confidence . . . to surrender both in his hour of desolation—will be told in a thousand schools long after we are gone. The way to peace and to the love of mankind lies in understanding. It lies not in the show of superior force or a haughty heel of a conqueror on the neck of the conquered. If the world dwells for ever in the past, there will be no rest from strife and war. Enemies cannot continue enemies for ever . . . but rather must they come to a deeper appreciation of each other's finer qualities. And they must weld those qualities into a harmonious whole for the ultimate good of the world.

Was it meet in that year 1926, long after the desert wars and the rifles of the invading Dervishes had been stilled, that the dead Mahdi should still come between perfect friendship and understanding between the British and the peoples of the Sudan? Was it fitting that the Mahdi from his tomb, falling to pieces in the sun, should rise up to embitter his conquerors, and bar for ever the way to peace, progress and prosperity?

On an island far away up the Nile . . . an island named Abba Island . . . dwelt the son of the Mahdi, Sir Abdel Rahman, with his followers . . . a tiny kingdom within a kingdom. The British Government had held out a somewhat half-hearted hand in friendship backed up by the

bestowing of a title on the son of their erstwhile, implacable enemy, and a promise that he should live out his life in peace. If he was a good little boy.

But the potentate could have been in no doubt that his existence was a thorn in the flesh to the British . . . and that Omdurman was far from forgotten. He seldom stirred beyond his island, except to come to Khartoum for occasions of ceremony. His heritage gave him entry . . . but never could he expect the firm clasp of friendship.

Sir Geoffrey Archer, chafing under the constant control of his Council, and the tying of his hands by Cairo, boldly announced that he intended to pay a visit, in full state, to Sir Abdel Rahman, son of the Mahdi, on his island of Abba.

His belief was that by such an unprecedented act he could win over for all time the loyalty of Sir Abdel and his family to Great Britain. The time had come for such a gesture. Archer expected opposition. He got it. In full measure and flowing over.

His advisers in Khartoum agitated and, uneasy, represented to him that if he did this thing he would put the rule of the British in jeopardy. They implored him to be swayed by their advice. But here they banged their heads against an iron determination. The Governor-General's mind was made up. He was conscious that he was doing what was right, what was best for his country. He was adamant. Not only did he inform his Council

that he would pay the visit as proposed, but that he would go ashore at Abba Island in full ceremonial uniform, and that his personal staff would do likewise. His staff were not consulted.

One of the Council sent for me. Other Members of Council asked me personally to see if I could dissuade Archer from his purpose. Our long association, and my obvious firm affection for my Chief, made it easier for me to tackle him than most people. I told the harassed Members that I agreed with my Chief, but that I would convey to him the depth of feeling and alarm he had conjured up.

The Governor-General's study at the Palace is a vast apartment . . . long and wide and impressive. At the far end, shaded by a screen, is the desk of ceremony. One night, late it was, I entered the room, shut the door, and made my way to the desk. My Chief had apparently not heard me come in. I came upon him before he saw me. He was sitting with his head in his hands, gazing in front of him. Here was not the fit, happy-looking man of Uganda.

His complexion, usually sunburned and vital, was grey, and to my accustomed eye he looked very ill indeed. My blood boiled. It was monstrous that he should not be happy and allowed to go his own way, but be harassed and worried by the very men who should by rights have taken all such burdens off his shoulders. Broad as they were.

I put my hand on Archer's shoulder. He looked up, angrily. This was a bad sign. He was never angry with me.

" You are sitting here very late," I said. " It is past eleven o'clock. Do come out into the air. It's stifling." He made no answer. " You know what they are saying," I went on boldly. " Are you sure that it will be all right ? "

I was genuinely distressed. I think he saw my distress and appreciated it. After all, we had been through some rough times together, and were genuine good friends, in spite of the disparity in our official positions.

" Don't worry," he said. " I know what I am doing."

I persisted. I asked him if Cairo had expressed disapproval of the project. " Not definitely," he replied.

I heard the rustle of wings.

The steamer took us to the Island of Abba . . . a flat, uninspiring gift of nature. The boat nosed into the landing stage, and Archer adjusted his plumed helmet. I wanted to put on khaki, in order that I could carry a revolver . . . my full white uniform was so decorative and tight-fitting that there was no room for such a weapon. I was overruled. Full dress was the order of the day. So consigning myself into the hands of Providence, I followed the procession on shore.

Sir Abdel Rahman, a picture of dignity and flowing robes, with his British decorations prominently displayed, escorted us to his house through a mass of natives, looking at us with curious eyes. We drank sweet tea out of china cups and ate pink little cakes. There was a great deal of talk. The

son of the Mahdi made a speech in which he stressed the honour which the Governor-General had paid him. Archer then spoke, through a villainous-looking interpreter. He expressed his appreciation for this peaceful and warm welcome.

The speeches finished . . . we walked slowly back to the ship. The visit was over. All had been quiet. There had been no " incident." With a snort our little vessel passed on into midstream and back to . . . to what?

There was no doubt that Archer had impressed the Sudan officials by his refusal to be dissuaded from his course. Some of them did not know he " had it in him." There are as many fools in the Sudan, I suppose, as there are anywhere else.

I saw very soon if we did not get home to England that Archer would have a nervous breakdown. Mysterious telegrams passed and re-passed between Cairo and Khartoum. Lloyd tried his best to stave off trouble, for he did more for Archer than Archer ever realised. A rest was indicated—unofficially we were to leave for England.

On July 7th, 1926, Mr. G. Locker Lampson, Under Secretary for the Foreign Office, made the following statement in the House of Commons, in answer to pertinent questionings :

" Sir Geoffrey Archer, the Governor-General of the Sudan, has been medically advised that it is essential for him to have at least one year in a temperate climate after about twenty-five years' continuous service in tropical Africa. As it was impossible to leave the Sudan without a Governor-

General, the Government had been regretfully compelled to accept his resignation."

The Under Secretary permitted himself to hope that "after sufficient rest, Sir Geoffrey's health might be sufficiently restored to enable him to continue his career of public service."

Thus ended Archer's career. At the early age of forty-four, a man in the prime of life. He had entered the Colonial Office as an Assistant Collector in the East African Protectorate in 1902 . . . had held with distinction the Governorship of Somaliland and Uganda, and the Governor-Generalship of the Sudan. He had been honest, hard-working and efficient.

He had done the State some service. They did not appear to know it.

As for me, no speeches were made in Parliament and my country remained aloof and unmoved regarding my state of health, or my future. But the day we left Khartoum I made a vow that never again would I take this kind of job. If there had ever been any pleasure in it, I had sucked that apple dry. I had endured the foulest climates, ruined my health—as it was to prove—nearly died of disease, been tired and homesick, on tip-toe with excitement and inexpressibly bored. I had had to suffer monumental fools and snobs of deepest dye, all with a good grace. I had watched intrigue in most of its more unpleasant forms . . . and had endured sufficient pettiness to last me a life-time.

Two men of high purpose whom I had served I

was to see rewarded by disappointment and misunderstanding. The first, Archer . . . the second, Lloyd.

For Egypt has been the graveyard of reputations and serves ill those who best serve her. Before his time of office was completed, Lord Lloyd was to be recalled by Sir Austen Chamberlain. He was too much of an Imperialist, too much a man who saw his path plain and followed it, too much a man imbued with the vision of Lawrence of Arabia to suit a Government come to office by the skin of its teeth.

The Socialists, afeared of a Proconsul with such outstanding characteristics and knowledge of the peoples of the East, had said "Lloyd must go." The Socialists went out of office. The Conservatives concluded that they too might find Lloyd an uncomfortable bedfellow. So the High Commissioner was sacrificed by the Conservatives as a parting gesture of friendship to the Socialists. An extraordinary, and unsavoury business.

We want a High Commissioner, mused the Conservatives, Lloyd's own party, who will jump when we pull the string. So they sent one in due course.

Now Lord Lloyd is out of active office, a brilliant, far-sighted administrator. He still labours as restlessly as ever. He regards the Chairmanship of the British Council as a whole-time job and spends many hours upon it. He speaks all over the country and he is a natural leader of youth. He could do so much to inspire the new generation were his hands not fettered. And Archer, fitter in health

and mind than ever, divides his time between big-game shooting wild beasts with the Rajah of Kutch and managing a salt mine in India. It must be confessed that he is extremely happy.

Great Britain does not apparently need such men nowadays. When have we needed them more? The clue to the puzzle is beyond my comprehension.

Oh, those hands which were raised to high heaven at the very contemplation of the famous visit to the Mahdi's son on his island! The railing and wailing of official consciences . . . the cheeks blanching at so revolutionary a precedent . . . and the shout for the head on a charger.

On September 6th, 1937, the following paragraphs appeared in *The Times*, sent by the Alexandria correspondent of that august newspaper.

"The Sayyed Sir Abdel Rahman El Mahid, son of the famous Mahdi, Mohammed Ahmed, who died in 1885, after having captured Khartoum, has returned to the Sudan *after his visit to England.*"

We may with profit read on. "The visits paid this summer to England and Egypt by Sudanese officials are likely to have an important effect in the Sudan. Their vision enlarged by contacts made and experiences enjoyed abroad, they have returned to the Sudan full of determination to apply in their own country the methods, particularly British, that they have seen during their holiday."

If Sir Geoffrey Archer had not made the first move . . . well, here is enough to make a cat laugh. Cats do not laugh easily.

Khartoum we left with but little regret. It had

not brought us happiness. The Sudan is an ungrateful land, like a vicious colt that will not be broken in. It is dry and burning hot. Dust is in its breath and in its soul. It takes all and gives nothing.

What was I to do with my life? I was still very young—young to have seen so much, to have travelled so far and to have been present in the counsels of the mighty. I had no hankering after peace-time soldiering . . . for an army life is only bearable when a country is at war. I was worried. Archer had rebounded out of the slough of despond, though he was exceedingly unwell, and behaved like a schoolboy going on a holiday after a long, long term. His view was, "Oh, you will be all right, Collie. You will always fall on your feet." I foresaw little help from that quarter. It was natural, I suppose. When a prisoner escapes from prison he rejoices and is too busy rejoicing in his own new-won freedom to trouble too much about any of the other convicts. Even the convict who has helped him escape.

Our way home lay through Palestine and Syria, down to Constantinople and home by that intriguing Orient Express extravagance.

My principal memories of Syria are of drives in motor cars over hills and long precipices at break-neck speed, with men at the wheel who were obviously tired of life. But of Palestine I have the memory of Jerusalem.

We stayed at an hotel in Jerusalem—the High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, was away on

leave in England—and I had the room into which an enthusiastic citizen had taken pot shots at Lord Balfour. The window had been roughly mended. The apartment was more of a souvenir than a room and the conveniences were not modern and certainly not convenient.

I stood in the gateway through which Lord Allenby had ridden in triumph as a happy warrior . . . the gates through which Lawrence had passed to the land of disillusionment and to the bitter realisation that the words of man are not necessarily his bond.

We were taken round the Walls of Jerusalem by the Governor, that very remarkable man, Sir Ronald Storrs, who afterwards became Governor of Cyprus and was perhaps Lawrence's closest friend. Storrs had been many years in Jerusalem and loved every stone of it. I can imagine Storrs as being a man of few friends for the reason that he is a man of exquisite taste, a scholar of parts, possessing a witheringly acid tongue. But his friends, if few, would be staunch and true . . . chosen for their quality and not for their quantity, as befits a man of taste and sensibility.

A picturesque figure was Storrs. He affected enormous hats and flowing cloaks and a wealth of gesture. He reminds me always of the pictures of the Cavaliers of old, though if this is a swashbuckler he is a swashbuckler with a volume of poetry in his pocket instead of a sword at his hip. . . . He was rather intolerant and self-assertive, but had an undoubted charm. Some years later

I heard Ronald Storrs broadcast a talk on Lawrence, the most perfectly phrased, most beautiful tribute I have heard one man give of another. No swashbuckler here . . . A curious puzzling character . . . one which only reveals its true self in the big moments. To the favoured few.

The streets of Jerusalem were then narrow and smelly, flanked by little shops. They were without appeal—the same streets, the same little dingy shops found in the purlieus of a hundred Eastern towns. Depressing, poverty-stricken, uninspiring . . . and disease-ridden. Jerusalem is more modern now.

We were led by devious and tortuous ways to the Wailing Wall. The cries and lamentations of the Jews, rising and falling, struck hard upon the ear. An aged man and a woman were tearing their hair and beating their breasts . . . kneeling, stretching out hands to high heaven . . . imploring God with the eternal cry of the Jews that He might give them peace and a pillow for their head.

I do not like all Jews. I do not like all Christians. But the good Jews, and I have known four or five intimately, are upright, honest and of great kindliness. Once they get over their natural suspicion and mistrust of the stranger within their gates . . . brought about by generations of sufferings, they take you to their hearts. And their friendship, once given, is not lightly lost. Their love of family is to me a wonderful thing . . . they care in sickness and in health for their dependants and for the least amongst them.

The lamentations at the Wailing Wall made me

shudder. They were bewailing the persecutions that had been. Were they bewailing the persecutions that were to come? Perhaps the Almighty was not attending too closely that day in Jerusalem . . . for the sky was a clear blue and the day was warm and fine, and it seemed to me as if the Creator might be feeling a trifle annoyed that His Peace should be disturbed by the cries of His Children.

Those cries were to grow and grow in volume . . . and they have not ceased yet. The cries were to find more dreadful cause for mercy pleas in the turning of the years which were to come . . . the years which are. Now.

"For sufferance is the badge of all our Tribe." . . . So said the Jew, Shylock. . . . The words bite deep into history and are ever true. To what good purpose? I was brought up to dislike the Jews, but I never heeded that teaching. For myself, if a man is my friend and walks in the path of uprightness and honour, I care not whether he be Christian or Jew . . . that race which goes in spirit day after day to its Wailing Wall . . . seeking a solution . . . and finding none.

My memories of the Holy Land lie within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the church at Bethlehem, housing the Manger in which Christ was born, and by the shores of the Dead Sea. In the churches there came over me a feeling of awe of which I was by no means ashamed. The hundred glowing candles, the motley throng, putting out a hand to touch a holy relic, gazing at

a cross with eyes of adoration . . . all this brought me back to my childhood days and the stories of the Holy Child and the humble Manger. It may have been the almost hysterical emotion of the crowds which thronged the churches . . . or of the memory of my Mother telling me of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the disciples of Christ. But I was gripped by a tightness at the throat . . . and was conscious that the ground whereon I stood was holy ground.

Jerusalem does not mean much to the present-day Christian. Not a particle of what Mecca means to the Mohammedan. It is a strange thing. And a sad thought.

By the shores of the Sea of Galilee I walked . . . as thousands of years ago others had walked and a Man had spread tidings of great joy. The waters lay calm and peaceful and glittered in the sun. Not far from us was a party of English tourists and one or two Americans. And I heard one of the tourists say, " I wonder whether one really can walk on that water." . . . And the laughter which this jest evoked died almost at its birth. . . stifled by a sudden awareness by the fools who caused it.

The Holy Land is an uncomfortable land. I would never return there. On your arrival you are conscious of no special atmosphere . . . but day by day . . . as you go to the places which you learned at your Mother's knee, you come to think and to wonder. To remain there long would be to jerk our sense of proportion out of shape. It is not well to think . . . or to wonder too much.

Jerusalem holds too much of the truth for it to be a comfortable dwelling place for anyone who faces life squarely. The world has swung by and left Jerusalem behind . . . for ever.

Perhaps at that time I was at an impressionable age. I do not think so. I do not know what it was which made me suddenly so dissatisfied. So at odds with myself—what it was set me thinking. I told my companions how Jerusalem was affecting me and that I wanted to get on and away. " Must be indigestion " . . . such was the reply I received. Perhaps it was indigestion. It is as good a reason as any, I suppose. They have that sort of indigestion in Mecca ! But they call it something else.

By degrees we reached the coast . . . passed through Damascus and as the guide-books so prettily have it, " other places of interest," and by boat we came to Constantinople.

Constantinople looks wonderful from the sea as you pass slowly up the Bay . . . the high buildings, the mosques with their green and golden domes. From the land it looks commonplace. It was very dusty, unwashed and full of Turks wearing bowler hats. Here the East was rapidly going West and suffering badly in the process.

We lunched and dined at the Embassy with the Ambassador ; visited a Mosque or two. We tried to find a bit of night life, failed, and caught our train to Calais . . . seen off by more bowler hats and the fattest detective in the Orient.

A heat wave was on. Five days Archer and I lived in that Orient Express . . . as it rattled

through country after country bearing us back home. And to the end of our partnership. Four and a half years.

It says much for our friendship that during that ghastly train journey we never quarrelled. Archer, who loathed the heat, lay on his bunk and groaned, and our day was made up of large meals and visits from garlic-breathing officials, in a bewildering variety of caps, who asked us for our tickets incessantly. And tore them to smaller and smaller bits at each visitation . . . with sadistic gratification.

Curious, the inarticulateness of the genus man. Reaching London, I drove Archer to his home in Pont Street. The time came to say good-bye. I was going home to Ireland, and he here and there . . . to get fit again . . . and to await the call to new jobs and pastures new. But I knew that once he had tasted freedom he would never return to the chains, clank they never so loudly.

He and I had experienced sunshine and rain together. We had seen one another at our best, and had borne with one another at our worst. Each of us, the master and the staff officer, had learned his lessons . . . and we had reached the same conclusions, albeit by different paths.

I had served him with what ability I had and with unremitting loyalty. And he had proved a worthy chief and a staunch friend. I must confess I found it infernally difficult to say good-bye, to break so long an association and comradeship, with just a casual word. I am not as emotional

nowadays. I have learned much these last few years.

"Well, good-bye, Collie," Archer said. "It's been a hectic four years. I'll miss you."

With that we shook hands, remarked on the appalling misfortune of coming out of a heat wave into a heat wave . . . London was sweltering . . . and bang ended a chapter. A long chapter, boring and exciting . . . sad and gay . . . with many a change of scene and many a memorable moment.

I called a taxi cab. And got in. I leaned back, first packing the vehicle with my suitcases. Inside my trunks were my gay uniforms, my swords, one gilt, one silver . . . my riding boots, my khaki red-tabbed uniforms, my gold spurs, my plumed helmet, my aiguelettes and seventeen suits.

In my mind I bade farewell to my uniforms and trappings of ceremony and pageant. I would not need them again. To the moth balls with them. I counted over my balance at the bank, and calculated how long I could go before I had perforce to hunt for a job.

The taxi cab bowled along. What job could I do? My stammer was rather bad again, for I had had such serious illnesses and been through such mental strain of late. I could not go on the stage. A pity. I loved acting. I might not have been a bad actor. I could not be a barrister, like my father. I had always longed to follow in his steps. I had been invalided out of the Army. They wouldn't want me back again, and anyway, I had had enough heartiness to last me a lifetime.

My heart missed a beat. What on earth was I going to do? I knew that in a month or two my speech would get all right again, as right as it ever could get. But there would always be a slight hesitation. Insuperable obstacle to the stage . . . the Bar . . . to medicine. I couldn't live at home in Ireland. I tried that once—never again. I had no qualifications for anything. Here was irony. I had travelled very far, I had met countless hundreds of people, influential and famous . . . and I had told millionaires, generals, admirals, even princes, to stand in a row and do as they were told. What use was all this to me? . . . Now?

I took off my hat. It was as warm as Bombay in the taxi . . . I wiped my forehead. Curse all heat waves. WHAT ON EARTH WAS I GOING TO DO? The wheels of the cab revolved to the words, like the wheels of a train which clang out a melody . . . monotonously just out of tune.

I gave up thinking. It was too hot. And altogether too depressing to think. What assets had I? Enough money for a month or two of rest, a considerable experience in the ways of men and women, an enormous acquaintance, a passably good figure, not too bad an appearance if the light was kind, a quick brain, a capacious memory, an appreciation of the best and unfortunately the most expensive things, a few good friends, an adorable stepmother and a quite appallingly exclusive London Club.

The taxi creaked up to the hotel where I was to stay for a day or two, to get my bearings. A sudden

thought struck me. A happy, transfiguring thought. I had forgotten the most important of my immediate assets.

I paid the taxi man, a fat, burly creature, sweating at every pore.

"Taxi man," I said, "do you realise one tremendous fact . . . namely that I have in my possession no fewer than seventeen suits?"

He regarded me with an alarmed tolerance.

"You don't say, sir?" he replied, feeling for the handbrake.

"My God, but I do," I said.

At any rate I would plunge into the future decently dressed.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

JUST while I remember . . . three more leaves from my African note-book before I shut the volume with a snap and put it away in a cupboard high up on a shelf among the dust.

A tribute must be paid to four Somali musketeers and a Sudanese sergeant, with a rolling laugh and a heart of gold. These five worthies flit in and out of the pattern of my African years and were my very good friends.

The Somali is known as the Irishman of Africa . . . and with reason. Though he hails from a country which is arid and sunbaked and his life is a constant struggle for existence against starvation, he has the merry nature and the gay personal charm in which not even his brother the Arab can excel. His sense of humour is easily aroused and he is needle sharp on the uptake. He is the perfect follower and companion, is faithful unto death and is at times impossibly tiresome and unmanageable.

The pride of race of the Somali is a thing to wonder at. For him there is no country like Somaliland. Wherever he wanders, for he is a great wanderer, his object is to return to the land of his birth with enough money to settle down with a wife . . . the Somali girls are very lovely, and

tend his herds. He will talk largely to his friends of the lands he has visited and the wonderful things he has seen and done, and as the smoke curls thicker from the fire, the tale will lose nothing in the telling. For the Somali has a lively imagination and modesty is a virtue in which he sees little point.

This son of the East is exceedingly good looking, of which fact he is entirely aware. His vanity is incredible, and when he receives his pay he spends most of it on clothes of flaming colour, on silks and raiment of the most luscious material. His complexion is pale coffee-colour, his head well shaped and his features small and beautifully formed . . . the Adonis of the East glorying in his personal charms and looking down with undisguised contempt on every other race on which the sun shines. He is slender and lives on rice and that foul stuff, Ghee, rancid butter which he devours in large quantities. In spite of the æsthetic nature of his physique and his love, and appreciation, of the comforts of civilisation, the Somali has uncanny powers of physical endurance. On safari he is at his best and then he sheds his affectations and pettinesses. He becomes the perfect companion.

For days he will stride along in the burning sun in pursuit of game. He can do practically without food, and a bag of dates and a water bottle will last him for an incredible time. His eye is as keen as the eye of a hawk, and his ears catch the slightest sound in the bush. A snap of a twig, the rustle of an animal gliding through the forest half a mile

away and the Somali stops dead. He has heard all . . . he runs with feet which made no noise . . . he is swift and sure and he is without fear.

Omar, Dinar and Mohammed Hassan enrolled under Geoffrey Archer's banner in the early days in Somaliland and never left him till he returned to London in 1926 from the Sudan. They were his personal servants, his gunbearers and his friends. They were never far from his side, and assumed a proprietary right in him which everyone else—except myself—found irritating beyond endurance. When Archer became a Governor, his Somalis took on the air of a Governor . . . when he became a Governor-General they behaved as they knew Governor-Generals should behave. They would take orders from no one except their own master. Not even from Lady Archer, and certainly not from me.

When I came out first with Archer to East Africa, his servants met him at Aden and assumed immediate charge of us all. Omar, Dinar and Mohammed Hassan greeted me with courtesy, but were obviously withholding their judgment. It took me a long time to break down their reserve and their irritating conceit . . . but some months afterwards they informed Archer that they approved of me and would take me under their wing.

At Mombasa—that hateful furnace—I engaged a Somali servant of my own, Abdi Ali. Omar had decided that I must have a Somali retainer for, as he told me with a flashing smile, the natives of Uganda were inferior beings, dishonest and

hideously ill favoured. Somalis are given to such pronouncements.

So Abdi was brought along to the train and began his duties. Somali servants are very expensive. They demand exorbitant pay and they expect you to buy them clothes for every occasion. The higher the position in which their master lives, the more splendid in array must be his servant. They have such charm of manner that they could get on the right side of a hippopotamus. They are sometimes maddening beyond all patience, and boastful and vain to a degree and at times they are cheeky. But such is their gift of blarney that it is impossible to be angry with them for more than three minutes at a stretch.

Omar was round of face and was always laughing. Never in my life have I met such a perfect servant, from organising a fortnight in the bush to a Government House dinner party—he was superb. Nothing disturbed him, and he was rather strikingly free from the Somali characteristics of his fellows. For he was easy going and his temper was slow. Little Dinar smiled unceasingly . . . he was the ugly duckling of them all. His English was fluent and at times impossible to follow, and he had every guile at his finger tips. He was naughty, greedy, and colossally impertinent, but always stopped when he had gone just a fraction too far, and would take it for granted that he had been forgiven. His ways used to keep us laughing even in the most tiring of days and circumstances . . . his smile, wide and all-embracing, was never absent from his

extraordinary little face. Like a philosophic tree gnome.

Mohammed Ali was the most graceful human being I have ever known, of any nation or clime. Six feet tall, willowy, with a tiny head and tiny regular features and white teeth, he was really ridiculously handsome. As a hunter he was the hardiest of them all . . . and he could read volumes in any trail or in the crushing of a leaf on a tree.

He spoke seldom. He was superlatively vain and pleased with himself. Whenever we went to another town we knew that there would be trouble in the bazaars that night. For Mohammed, bedecked in silk and satin, holding his head high, would tell the natives of that town that they were all sons and daughters of bitches, that they were uneducated and altogether unclean, and that they were not fit to dust the sandals of any Somali . . . a race of which he was, so he informed them, so striking a member.

My boy Abdi was quiet and efficient. He was thrilled with my tales of aeroplanes and told his friends that no one he had seen had ever had such wondrous clothes. In this way he obtained great kudos, for he reflected the glory of his master.

Hour after hour Mohammed, clothed in white uniform, with red tarbusch, white shorts, blue stockings and red aiguelettes, would stand at the door of Archer's office. To him all Englishmen were the same. That is to say, inferior to all Somalis. If the highest member of Council tried to push him aside, he would be met with an iron

resistance, and those brown gazelle-like eyes would narrow and turn to pin points.

One day, after he had been nearly two years in my service, a virulent fly stung my boy Abdi in the neck. He thought nothing of it and I applied some iodine and forgot about it. The next day he was down with a fever and raving, and he was rushed to the hospital at Entebbe. In three days he was dead . . . from erysipelas. And I had lost a faithful servant and a good friend.

Abdi's death cast a gloom over us all ; everyone loved him though he was rather a man who walked by himself and had a dignity very much his own.

The day of his funeral dawned . . . a Mohammedan funeral, of course, the corpse carried high on a bier and the little procession of friends following. Suddenly the procession stopped and a tall figure came and took up his place at the head . . . and walked slowly to the graveyard. It was Archer come to pay his tribute.

It would take years in which to describe the horror occasioned among the British officials and their wives at the unprecedented action of their Governor walking in the funeral procession of a " mere Somali servant." It was beyond them to understand that Archer had brought the Somalis to a strange country and that he considered he stood as guardian for them. One of them had died in the service of his A.D.C. . . . and therefore he should be honoured in death where all manner of men—are equal.

The Somalis, though pleased at this gesture, did

not attach too much importance to it. They expected their master to walk in the funeral procession of their brother. They would have been horrified had he not done so. But the Buganda, the Uganda natives, held up their hands in astonishment and for ever afterwards gave Archer their unstinted affection. And loyalty.

The fifth Musketeer, Ibrahim Seyd, was a Sudanese . . . and Archer's right-hand man. They had hunted together since Archer was a junior officer in the Colonial Service and Ibrahim was to end his days in his shadow.

A man of authority was Ibrahim and highly remarkable in that he, though a Sudanese, was able to keep the Somalis under control. They would listen to no one except to Ibrahim . . . for they knew the place he had in his master's heart and they respected his daring and courage and his kindly wisdom.

The gay Mohammed Ali is now dead. He was smitten with creeping paralysis and went home to his village hard by to Aden, there to wait for the end. A sad homecoming for such an exquisite creature . . . for one so young and gay, so grand a hunter, so alive a mortal. He died some years afterwards. I remember him with pleasure and affection. He was unique . . . and great of heart. His faults were surface faults.

Ibrahim Seyd, too, is dead. . . . He died as he would have wished to die . . . on duty. His passing aimed a blow at Archer's heart, for between these two there was a bond of close understanding,

and a comradeship which set at nought the differences in race and colour. Lady Archer once said that Ibrahim Seyd was the greatest gentleman she had ever met. She has said no truer word.

Omar and Dinar, the two who are left, live at Aden and wait in their villages till their master returns. He will come back . . . he does come back. When Archer passes Aden on his yearly trips to his salt mine in India and he lands at Aden, Omar and Dinar are there on the quay with beaming faces.

They take him out to Mohammed Ali's grave . . . and there they leave him. They are people of rare sensibility, tact and understanding.

I bid my Somali friends farewell . . . and I shall not forget them. Their ways, their charm and affections, their loyalty, courage and beyond all, their pride, have won them a place in my heart.

They are men of breeding and culture in a universe of savages.

. . . . . .

I was one day at a luncheon party . . . always an abomination . . . and I had the misfortune to sit next to a young woman with carmined lips, a bright yellow tongue and no eyebrows. She added to these handicaps a voice like a rusty saw and a mind of unparalleled emptiness. She had just read that a scientist had discovered a cure for leprosy. Knowing that I had been in the East, she turned to me and babbled, " How too thrilling for those dear lepers. Such a relief for them,

don't you think? Now they can all get well and behave like decent people. Oh, do tell me what you think of my new hat?"

I told her. She has not spoken to me since.

My mind took me back to a very hot day in East Africa when I was one of a party to visit officially a leper settlement . . . high mud walls surrounded the compound and there was no shade.

We were met at the little wooden gate by the two missionaries whose task—a voluntary task—it was to look after the souls and the bodies of the poor, maimed children of Africa. They were Americans and I regarded them with a certain awe, endeavouring to picture to myself what manner of life it was they led. Their daily life could not hold much joy. But their faces wore a look of peace and contentment.

We followed them into a vast, sun-caked court-yard and there, drawn up in a circle, were a multitude of lepers. The lepers who were too ill to stand up sat upon the ground. As we drew near to them they began, in eerie unison, to sing "God Save the King." I could not have stirred a muscle for a king's ransom. Never before, or since, have I known such a feeling of horror, of admiration, and of immeasurable pity.

Their thin, reedy voices rose in volume and trailed away to a pitiful and ghostly silence. Many of them had no mouths with which to sing. Many had no hands with which to wave us greeting and others had no eyes with which to see. Their

faces were ravaged beyond the power of description and their bodies twisted and disfigured with this most dreadful scourge.

We moved forward to inspect them. . . . I watched the two missionaries, the finest type of missionary there is. They spoke kindly words to their charges, and as they spoke, their faces showed no sign of revulsion. Only a wonderful, loving pity. I just could not look too closely at the ruined faces. I hope I may be forgiven.

We were shown the whole settlement, the little mud huts in which the lepers lived and were fed and tended, and then the sun-scorched graveyard wherein they sought, and at last found, surcease from their misery.

And yet my memory draws no picture of misery. The lepers looked happy enough . . . as men and women who realise there is no hope look happy, for no greater evil can touch them, and thankfully, they draw near to their eternal rest.

I am glad I told that idiotic woman what I thought of her hat. I wish I had added what I thought of her grimy little soul.

. . . . . .

The land of Kenya is an enchanted land and the highlands, basking in the sleepy protection of Mount Kenya, offer the visitor a promise of health and happiness. The days are warm and the evenings are cool and fresh. Throughout the year the climate is invigorating . . . and to the sportsman, the coffee planters and the rich men in

search of a hobby, Kenya offers excitement, industry and pleasant idleness in turns.

Of late years many of the planters have suffered terrible losses and the tales told have been tragic. The late Lord Delamere, when I was out in East Africa, was the king of Kenya and the leader of the settlers, in the main a good type of Englishman. This landowner, a striking-looking man with a leonine head, owned thousands of acres of coffee plantations—so far as the eye could see, and employed enormous numbers of natives who were happy in his service. Now and again ugly stories would be told of settlers in isolated districts ill-treating their natives and taking native girls to live as their " wives." The law dealt severely with any sadists, and it is very far from true to say that in Kenya there is one law for the white man and another for the black. The law has little to do with white men who take native girls to live with them, if they are honourably purchased from their parents. White men who live so much alone cannot be judged by ordinary standards. And should not be so judged, as I must repeat.

Kenya suffered for a time from affluent white men who ran away with other white men's wives. They herded together and lived in a district which came to be known as " The Happy Valley," and which grew to be the synonym for wild nights, sexual licence and heavy drinking. The devil invades any paradise when he can squeeze his way in, but the devil is a greatly exaggerated demon and thrives on inaccurate publicity.

Nyeri . . . Nukuru . . . what lovely spots these are . . . rolling plains and hills and air which would give life to the dullest constitution and bring hope to the most shattered heart.

Kenya must seem a paradise for those who " want to forget." Will they never realise that in its silences and its beauty they can do nothing but remember ?

Coming out on the boat I met an Englishman who was obviously very much overburdened with the goods of this world. He owned a large farm up in the wilds of the Highlands and seemed a merry fellow. I liked him. We struck up a pleasant acquaintanceship and he told me that any time I liked I could come and stay with him. He promised me peace, good fishing and a horse to ride. The picture he painted was fair enough and I hoped the day would come when I would be able to accept his invitation.

The day came. I had been ill in Uganda . . . I was so frequently ill . . . and obtaining sick leave, I wired my friend of the ship. He replied " Come whenever you like."

It is a long journey from Uganda across the Lake, by train to the station of Nakuru in Kenya and then nearly one hundred miles by car to the farm, skirting precipices, tearing over hills and down steep inclines, in scenery which for sheer loveliness I have never seen equalled.

The farm stood serene and lonely overlooking the hills of Kenya . . . at the foot of the mighty mountain. Cattle roamed the plains and hard by

the garden flowed a trout stream where wild flowers grew. No other house for miles. For the seeker after rest and quiet, for the philosopher in need of stronger proof of the truth of his philosophy, here was heaven indeed.

My host bade me welcome. The house was furnished regardless of expense. The beds were from Heals . . . the carpets were Persian and the cellar had come bodily from Justerini and Brooks. If this was roughing it in the wilds, I was content to rough it.

After dinner the first night I noticed that my host was unusually silent. Perhaps it was that I was the first white man he had seen for some months. He seemed to me to have lost his gaiety and there was a curiously strained look in his eyes. Endeavouring to be the perfect guest, I spoke warmly of the beauty of his home, the snugness of his house . . . he had designed it himself. I said I was sure I would "love it here." My expressions of admiration were rewarded by non-committal grunts. He rose and replenished my glass. He refilled his glass with brandy. That was his seventh refuelling and the brandy was very old and pungent.

I grew uneasy. Night had fallen and the silence was intense . . . more overpowering even than the silence of the desert. A door creaked. My host sprang to his feet, upsetting his brandy, and now the look of strain on his face was more noticeable. He opened the front door, peered out, shut it, returned to his chair by the fire. . . . Kenya

nights at Kenya heights are cold . . . and said never a word.

I was flummoxed. The driver of my car had driven back the hundred miles to Nakuru. And I was here till he came again in six days' time. The servants slept in their compound. There was no one in the house but we two. This was not the man I had met and liked on the boat. What in mercy's name had happened to him?

It was of no avail making conversation. The brooding man opposite me had something on his mind and he would not tell me what it was. He puffed at a pipe, now and again kicking a log into a blaze. I had had enough of it. I had been unwell and my nerves were none too steady. All this was not calculated to soothe them.

"I'm going to bed," I said. My host jerked out of his reverie. He led the way to my room. A call of a bird broke the silence. He jumped. "Damned noisy district this," he said. "Don't know how I stand it sometimes. Well, good-night. Don't lock your door. You're perfectly safe out here."

I locked my door that night and every succeeding night. The days were not so bad, for my host seemed happier when he was astride a horse and he and I were galloping over the plains, or when he was showing me how to land a trout in the stream. He was a fine fisherman and I was a hopeless novice. But the evenings were ghastly. It was always the same. Sitting opposite to one another across the fire . . . neither of us speaking

a word. I had long since given it up. I waited with nerves on edge to see him start from his chair and watch his eyes dilate. He never failed me. The performance was always dead on time, but it was an entertainment I could have done without. The next day I was going back to Uganda and never would I set eyes on this man again . . . not willingly. My visit was proving much too Somerset Maugham for my liking.

My host lowered buckets of brandy that night. Came our ritual, "Well," I said, "I'm going to bed." And made to leave the sitting-room. He came and stood and looked at me. "Why do you lock your door?" he asked with a curious insistence. "I told you not to. No one can hurt you here." And he smiled. I was sure that he was temporarily mad. The thought had struck me two days before. Now I was sure of it.

I did not reply. I locked my door and bolted it. I pushed a chest of drawers across the door, in the approved Wild Western style, smiling a little shamefacedly to myself as I did so. But after all, I was too young to die and I did not relish having my throat cut. I stayed awake all night. I listened to my companion in this strange house moving about . . . the clink of decanter on glass at intervals. Till the dawn came.

He saw me off the next morning, his old self. Smiling and gay. "Come and stay with me again soon," he cried. I looked out from the back of the car and watched the house disappearing in the distance—till I was dipped into a valley.

The driver leaned towards me. "Had a good time?" he asked. And he glanced down at my hand. It was quivering like a leaf.

He asked no further questions. He required no further answer.

I knew another fellow who had a farm in the Highlands of Kenya. A charming, good-natured fellow mortal, the brother, incidentally, of my oldest friend. The brothers were the best of pals and when in London together were inseparable . . . till the elder had to return to his farm and his work.

Shortly after this terrifying experience of mine with the silent host, I took up a newspaper and a headline hit me between the eyes. My friend had shot himself. His native servants found him in the morning with a bullet in his brain. He had walked to a looking glass, holding his revolver. Slowly and deliberately he had pointed it at the side of his head, and had pulled the trigger.

"Reason for death unknown," was the verdict. But I knew better—I know better.

Kenya is a land of beauty and seductiveness. It calls to man with a loud voice. It is never well for a man to live alone. . . . It is fatal for a man to live alone in Kenya, unless he is of a bovine disposition and endued with as much sensitiveness as a stalled ox.

The loneliness eats into the heart and into the brain. The silences set the mind ticking-ticking, conjuring up unfathomable thoughts. And the rare beauty of the country does nothing but

encourage the poison and set it coursing through the nerves.

I love Kenya . . . and its life. I shall, I hope, go back there some day. Maybe I shall live there if I can ever afford not to work. But I shall not go alone.

Why do you lock your door ?

## CHAPTER TWELVE

WHAT on earth was I going to do?

Few men and women there are who have not passed through a time of tribulation and despair. To some it comes at the beginning . . . to some it comes at the end. From some lives it is never absent and the afflicted ones go down to their graves still puzzling over why they had been put into a world which obviously had never had any use for them.

Till the age of twenty-nine I had never known what it was to be without the good things of life. I had suffered considerable agony of mind and body during the war years, but so had most people. I had at least escaped with all my faculties in perfect working order, except one, and that would improve with time and confidence. I had travelled afar, had held wonderful jobs and had met people who " mattered " in all walks in life.

When I was selfish and inconsiderate, as are most young people, I found that I was easily forgiven and I never suffered much from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Popularity I discovered, came easily enough to me, and my friends had always been ready to help me . . . and to forgive me. Perhaps too ready to forgive me. I got on well with all sorts and conditions

of men. While I was in positions to dispense favours, by virtue of the high standing of the men I served, I basked in smiles. I had never had to consider from where the rent for my habitation was coming or whether I could afford a five-course dinner instead of one. I had lived in style and comfort, with no rent to pay, no meals to order and no bills to come surging at me. I was accustomed to arrive at station platforms and find red carpet laid out, and a special train waiting with a staff of servants and a chef in attendance. If I had wanted a motor car I rang a bell and it appeared. I had worked reasonably hard but free from little worries, the gnawing worries which eat into the minds of men and sap their strength.

The primrose path was the path I had trod and I had never paused to consider that the primrose path must eventually come to an end when I voluntarily determined never again to go abroad on a staff job. I knew so many influential people . . . I had never had any difficulty in getting what I wanted. There was a fine, fat job waiting for me somewhere in London. Of course. So I would rest a while and take a job at my leisure.

The struggles and disillusionments—the rude awakening of a human being are not too welcome as a subject of conversation among one's fellow beings. Other people's troubles, except to the rare souls who are possessed of understanding and loving pity, are apt to prove boring.

I was to find that my influential friends . . . and my Society friends . . . were still charmed to see

me, but that when I began talking about "jobs," they moved away and changed the conversation. People were kind as ever, but they refused to take me seriously . . . I was still looked on as a playboy, a fortunate fellow who would have no trouble whatever in falling on his feet. They thought that the idea of my ever taking my coat off to work was not only rather amusing but slightly indecent.

I played around for a month or two and had a good time. I wrote some songs which were accepted and felt I was making headway. I went to stay with my friends in their nice country houses. I was always welcome . . . always in demand so long as I did not bring the sordid subject of work into the tittle-tattle.

Quite suddenly I grew afraid. I had a little money of my own, but not enough to keep me in suits, let alone enough to live on. In fairness to myself it must be remembered that money had for so long meant nothing to me . . . with houses free, servants free, food and drink and cars free, and my pay to be used for luxuries only. Even then I always seemed to be in debt. I was ridiculously extravagant. What matter? There was always the end of the month when a beneficent Government would credit my account with a pleasant reward.

But now I was out of work. I dare say I could have got jobs of a sort, but a new feeling was coming over me. A feeling that I wanted to make my way in the world all on my own. To live no more on princes' favours.

I was soon to find the worth of princes' favours. When I became really desperate and called on the princes, they were either out or too "busy" to see me.

I did not grow bitter. I shall never grow bitter, for bitterness is not in my make-up. An incurable faith in my fellow men, in spite of many disastrous experiences, has not shaken that faith. Not even now.

I grew timorous and nervous. There seemed so little I could do . . . and sometimes I would sit in my club alone and curse my stammer which was at one moment so all right, and the next moment so all wrong. When I was depressed and down, my speech grew worse, and at this time I lived in the dark pit of continual depression.

When I was in East Africa I had written a few humorous articles for a peculiar publication called the *London Mail*, long since defunct. My articles were all accepted, but I never thought I could write, and it had never occurred to me that perhaps I might have a chance in that line. The thought did strike me one day, but I dismissed it. No use. What in God's name was I going to do?

One day I thought of a kindly man I knew slightly, by name Sir Godfrey Thomas. He was then Private Secretary to the Prince of Wales and a power in the land. He had always been delightful to me when I had met him, but his nature is delightful and he is a rare person.

So I asked him if he could give me an introduction to a concern called the British Broadcasting

Company, functioning at premises in Savoy Hill. People were talking about it at that time and wondering what it was all about. No one took its services seriously and its audience was infinitesimal. But I had heard there were chances to be taken there and I felt I might, maybe, have some luck.

Godfrey Thomas was more ready to help me than were many of the great ones I knew very much better. But things happen that way, I find. He gave me a personal letter of introduction to the man in charge of the Staff at Savoy Hill, an Admiral, called Charles (now Sir Charles) Carpendale.

Armed with this letter, written on Buckingham Palace notepaper, I went along to the B.B.C. and sent up my card. The Admiral would see me, I was told. I was terribly nervous. The last months of disillusionment about myself and about people I had thought were my friends, had shaken my self-confidence. My relatives had done little to reassure me, for they never did a hand's turn for me or tried in any way to find me a job. They were too busy, I suppose. They all had families, anyway, and their immediate concern was to look after their own. I bear them no ill will. It was very natural, but at the time I thought that perhaps they might have troubled. Which added to my uneasiness of mind.

I found myself facing Admiral Carpendale, and I have no hesitation in saying that I took instantaneous fright of him. He curtly told me to sit down, and said he had read Godfrey Thomas's

letter. He barked at me that he would be glad if I told him what I wanted. Quickly, too.

One of my weaknesses was, and probably still is, that I am at a loss when anyone is unfriendly towards me. Such treatment has always been beyond my comprehension. No one ever had been unkind to me then, or had talked to me as if I were a defaulting clerk, and I just could not understand such behaviour. I had lived among people who treated others with courtesy and consideration, and the more important the people, the more marked their courtesy. Why was this man glowering at me. What had I done?

Slowly and in a low voice I told my questioner that I wondered whether I could be of any use at the B.B.C., adding that I had travelled a lot, knew a vast number of people and that my hobby had always been the theatre and the world of entertainment. I felt miserable, for I knew I was stammering more than usual . . . an effect any hostile atmosphere invariably had upon me. I felt as if I were choking.

The Admiral regarded me severely. Obviously a martinet and determined to stand no nonsense. A new breed to me—a Quarter-Deck terror.

"We have a vacancy for an Announcer, as it happens," he said. "But that would be no good to you. Why, *you can't even talk properly.*"

If I live to see great-great-grandchildren frolicking at my knee, I shall never forget the effect those words had on me. It was as if a knife had been plunged into my heart and twisted in the

wound. The pain I felt was almost physical. Tears sprang to my eyes and blinded me. Through a mist I gazed at this man who had spoken thus to me. I was like a child who had been kicked in the face and wondered why he had been so assaulted.

I never uttered one word in reply. I must have looked rather pale and ghastly, for my interrogator shrank back in his chair as I rose slowly to my feet. Did he but know it, I was trying to stop the room whirling round my head. I made my way to the door, opened it, slammed it behind me and ran down the stairs into the street.

I walked down to the Embankment and on and on. I must have tramped miles without realising it. . . . I did not want to see anyone or talk to anyone ever again . . . and the wound in my head which had been given me years before in my aeroplane crash, throbbed unbearably. My God, I thought, I would go back and strangle that fellow. I turned back, but only for a moment. And I resumed my walk. . . . At Lewisham I boarded a tram and came home. That night, for the first and last time in my life, except one other occasion, I cried myself to sleep.

Maybe I make too much of this episode. I do not think so. For it proved to be a momentous landmark for me. It woke me up to the fact that the world was not the kindly, friendly place I had always found it, and that it could be hard and relentless and icy cold. It forced me to the realisation that people would not, as a matter of

course, speak me fair words and treat me fair . . . and that I must never expect it. That I was stupid ever to have expected it.

And at that moment I vowed that sometime, somewhere, somehow, that barking Admiral would hear of me again . . . and that I would prove to be something very much more to be reckoned with.

Now that the years have passed by I realise that Admiral Carpendale did not mean to be so cruel . . . perhaps did not mean even to be unkind, and had no notion how his words would stab me. What he said was perfectly true. I could not talk entirely properly . . . even at my best days I hesitated over some words. . . . He had spoken the truth . . . he was a busy man . . . and it was not his fault if he considered that a Quarter-Deck manner to be something to be proud of and useful to frighten and impress the seeker after jobs.

I have seen Admiral Carpendale several times since. But he has never known it was I. Nor does he know that the timid young man he saw that day was, and still is, the man who is the B.B.C.'s sternest critic and has shown up the inner workings of the B.B.C. to the public so incessantly that at times the B.B.C. has been at a loss to know what to do. I have lost count of the number of times Sir John Reith had called—in vain—for my head on a charger.

The other heads of that peculiar institution have often been summoned to last-minute conclaves to decide what can be done about that fellow, Knox. Indeed, I owe the ungallant Admiral a debt of

gratitude. Unwittingly, not knowing it, it was his good deed for the day . . . and never was a good deed more skilfully disguised. He altered my outlook on this business of living.

I had had a considerable success, in a fashion, in the Army. In civilian life . . . in the world of jobs sought and sold . . . I was nothing. Whatever was to happen to me . . . whatever was to be my future . . . it came upon me in a flash that sitting in offices all over England were men who would bark at me and try to make me jump this way and that. Men who were too busy, too preoccupied to care or take thought for my private feelings.

Either I would be able to do the job . . . or not. If I could not do it, few words would be wasted on me . . . if I could, well and good, but even then I could not expect much consideration. Till eventually I should come to a position when I could bark back. If I were lucky.

I learned an eternity of wisdom in those horrible hours of my frenzied walk. I vowed, as I said my prayers that night . . . one of my silly non-modern habits . . . that if ever I should come to a position when I should be "someone" and mean something, that I would always consider the feelings of those less fortunate than myself. I prayed, moreover, that I might have the chance to make good my vows. That if the day dawned, and it was not to dawn without toil and utter weariness of spirit and body, I would stretch forth my hand to help and never say an unkind or a thoughtless

word to men who were at my mercy. I had known what mercilessness meant. Never should anyone go from my presence in the frame of mind in which I left those dingy, gloomy premises at Savoy Hill . . . twelve years ago. It is not long. It seems a lifetime.

I had one friend, honest and just and true, and he is my great friend still. His name is Philip Farrer, and he is Private Secretary to the Marquis of Salisbury, and the most generous and bravest-hearted man who walks this earth. I went to him and told him of my plight. And he comforted me as is his way, and told me to try and "write something." For surely my experiences should be worth something in a newspaper. He knew Mr. Gwynne, then Editor of the *Morning Post* and told him that I would submit an effort to him.

I went home and wrote an article about Sir Apolo Kagwa, my friend the Prime Minister of Uganda, who had died suddenly. The article was accepted, and with what a quickening of the pulse did I open my *Morning Post* on the morning of March 9th, 1927. It was all there. Not a word cut. And Ten Guineas floated through my letter box.

Heartened, and Mr. Gwynne, most benign and experienced of Editors, will never know how heartened I was . . . I sat down to write another article, this time on the life of an A.D.C. I sent it to the *Daily Express* and sat back to wait for the rejection slip. Surely two miracles could not occur in so short a time. Five days later to my

amazement I saw my article on the Leader Page of the *Daily Express* and by that post came a letter from the Editor . . . signed Beverly Baxter. The letter was encouraging and kindly.

Was a life of a writer, a journalist, after all to prove to be my "metier"? Should I apply to see this Mr. Baxter of glorious memory? I consulted Philip . . . who was always there, always ready to help and guide. I applied for an interview and went along to the offices in Shoe Lane . . . some years before the *Daily Express* was housed in a building resembling a cross between the glass Palace of the Shah of Persia and a super Cinema.

Mr. Baxter was too busy. He could not see me. There was no vacancy. His secretary was polite and well-mannered. Should there be any vacancy Mr. Baxter would let me know. Good morning.

My spirits sank. I was easily discouraged. I did not know what to do.

I determined to leave London for a while. And went off to Tenby in Wales with a friend of mine, Geoffrey Railton. He was an easy-going mortal and just the companion for a sick man. For my malaria was coming on again and I felt awful. All the time I wondered what was going to happen. My money was running out. Suddenly I packed up and came back to London. On my arrival I found an invitation to dinner at the Berkeley Restaurant, from Sir Herbert Stanley, who had just been appointed Governor of Ceylon. The invitation was for the next night.

The next day, prompted by some urge, inexplicable and sudden, I took a bus down to the *Daily Express* offices and demanded to see the Editor. The Editor was away, I was told. But was not Mr. Baxter the Editor? No, Mr. R. D. Blumenfeld was the Editor in Chief, and Mr. Baxter was the Managing Editor. Well, I would see the Managing Editor. I sent in my card.

After waiting three-quarters of an hour, I was summoned to an impressive room. Entering, I beheld a man who was to play a prominent part in my life for the next six years and prove to be an enigma I was never able to solve.

A short, rubicund person, with a round face, startlingly fresh complexion and keen blue eyes, rose from behind a desk to greet me. He smiled, determined to put me at my ease, and spoke to me in a soft and singularly attractive Canadian accent. I was waved to an arm-chair. He asked me what exactly it was that I wanted . . . and the blue eyes never left my face. I felt curiously drawn towards this man, though I did come as a humble suppliant. The twinkle in his eyes and the gentle voice soothed me. I liked Baxter on sight. I never stopped liking Baxter, even on the various occasions when I could gladly have brained him with a meat axe. He had amazing charm . . . a charm which he can switch on and off like the electric light by his door.

I opened my heart to him and found my stammer disappearing. I told him of my life and of the distinguished people I had served . . . at which he

nodded in a pontifical way . . . and that I was certain that I could write and that what I wanted was a chance. He interrupted me now and again, and let me go on pouring out my woes and hopes, though there were twelve people waiting to see him and the Edition was soon to "go to bed." He never batted an eyelid. He was entirely unperturbed. His poise was, and still is, uncanny. A man of iron self-control and unfathomable mystery.

At last I stopped, breathless. Baxter smiled at me. Like a father at an eager child . . . I still looked years younger than my age. Then he said . . . "I could give you a try-out as a sub-editor. We are short of a man on the sub's desk. You have no experience whatever, but you have been in the Army and I want men here who understand discipline. If I give you this job, Mr. Blumenfeld will probably sack you when he returns. If you go on the sub-editor's desk, you will have long hours, have to give up your social pleasures and most of your friends, and work with some fellows with whose ways you will have nothing in common. As we shall be teaching you your job I can only give you Five Pounds a week. After the life you have led . . . if you take the job . . . I will bet you that you will not stick it for five months. . . . What do you say? I advise you to try for something else."

I listened to this speech in silence. Then I said, "I'll take your job and your bet."

Baxter looked at me curiously. "So be it," he

said. "Don't blame me." He took up the telephone and summoned F. J. Farthing, the Night Editor.

Mr. Farthing entered. He was patently extremely annoyed as he had been called away from his post at a most inconvenient time. Baxter introduced us. Mr. Farthing, a dour, silent individual, with deep lines round his mouth, nodded shortly.

"Collie Knox will go on the sub's desk," Baxter said. "Keep an eye on him, will you? He will report for duty on Sunday." Farthing did not reply . . . just nodded again and fled . . . his new charge forgotten.

I rose. "Did you say Sunday?" I enquired.

"Yes," said Baxter. "And Five Pounds a week. How much did you get in your last job?"

"Nine Hundred a year, and all found, even whiskey," I replied.

We shook hands. "You can get out of it, you know," Baxter said. "Telephone me in the morning if you change your mind." And dismissed me.

Five Pounds a week . . . Two Hundred and Fifty a year . . . long hours . . . working Sundays too . . . entering an entirely new profession at my age . . . twenty-nine. Did not even know what the work was like. What on earth does a sub-editor do . . . and did Farthing always look so disapproving?

These queries darted backwards and forwards in my mind as I dressed that night for dinner. It was a Friday. Immaculate in white tie and tails, with a red carnation in my buttonhole, I set forth

for the Berkeley to keep my dinner date with Sir Herbert Stanley and his lady.

We dined well. The clatter of the diners . . . the soft lights and the discreet music offered a strange contrast to that office in Shoe Lane. My host was a man of about fifty, quiet and cultured, and his wife a good deal younger. They were obviously a devoted couple . . . and she was looking forward to going out to Ceylon as a Governor's wife.

Over dinner Sir Herbert offered me the post of his A.D.C. cum Private Secretary . . . pay nearly a thousand a year and all found. I had only to say the word and the bargain was sealed. I was just the man he had been looking for. More champagne?

I thanked him and asked if I could think over the offer. There were complications, I explained. He readily agreed. And we said good-night.

I walked home in the cool of the evening. My head rang with the words, five pounds a week . . . a thousand pounds a year . . . five pounds a week and a job I shall hate . . . a thousand pounds a year and a job I know backwards, among people I am accustomed to . . . five pounds a week . . . a bed-sitting room . . . five pounds a week . . .

Though it was after midnight I telephoned the patient Philip Farrer and asked him what I ought to do. He unhesitatingly said " Ceylon, of course. It's the life you are fitted for. It's a splendid offer."

But I knew that Ceylon would not see me . . . and that never again would I go back to that life. I would take that five pound a week job and see how long I could stick it. Everybody would tell me I was mad. Well, I would show them. I had never felt like this before.

Next day I telephoned Baxter confirming my acceptance of his proposition. I wrote to Sir Herbert Stanley, telling him I could not come with him and explaining why. And hoping he would understand. I told Philip who looked wise and far from happy about my decision. I told my stepmother who, like the darling she is, merely said that of course I knew best and everything would turn out all right.

I spent the remainder of the day looking for a small flat which I would have to furnish on the hire purchase system. After viewing a dreary succession of architectural abortions, I finally selected one—furnished, at Two Pounds a week. It was not too disastrously ill-equipped and it would save me buying furniture. Five Pounds a week was not going to be much. I owed Four Hundred Pounds as it was.

The flat was one of about seventeen hundred . . . a dwelling with three rooms and a kitchen. The block which houses these homes from home was vast, black and tawdry beyond comprehension. The large courtyard was lit at night by oil lamps . . . burning fitfully . . . making the building look like a lunatic asylum or one of our more ancient houses of correction. My flat was

on the sixth floor. There was no lift and there were not stairs but steps. Stone steps . . . eight hundred and fifty of them. I counted ; every one apart.

And to think that one night in our special train in India . . . my quarters being a bedroom and a bathroom, I had complained bitterly because I only had two pillows instead of three !

At half-past four on the Sunday I reported to Mr. Farthing of the *Daily Express*. He took me into a huge room . . . with telephone boxes ranged down one side and a very large horse-shoe table filling the centre of the scene. Round this table were seated fifteen men . . . all sub-editors.

None of them looked up as I approached. Some had their coats off and were working in shirt sleeves . . . others bent down to decipher wads of type-written copy. The pencils worked like mad, crossing out . . . altering . . . and the fruits of their labours were tossed into a basket, like heads falling beneath a knife.

Farthing, for whom I was to come to have a warm regard, took me over to one end of the horse-shoe. He introduced me to the man sitting at that spot, a tiny little man with a keen nose and friendly eyes.

" Mr. Breething is the Chief Foreign Sub-Editor," Farthing told me. " This is the foreign desk. All the cables and news from abroad. You will sit here." With this he retreated to the glory of his own table at the other end of the room ; this vast, dingy room.

He left me in utter bewilderment and at a dead loss.

I sat down on the hard bench and eyed my companion. No one took the slightest notice of me. This was worse than being a new boy at school. All the time the room rang with the most awful din . . . messengers darting in, telephonists screaming into telephones, a frenzied being, who I was told was the Chief Sub-Editor, calling out instructions. An extraordinary little man, in a suit several times too large for him, a large gap between trousers and waistcoat, and a straggling moustache and a badly fitting toupé, kept on yelling in all directions, in a musical Welsh accent.

All this while the sub-editors did not lift their heads. Occasionally one would take out a cigarette, light it and stretch himself and then bow his head anew to his task. No one spoke on that desk. No one smiled. I was reminded of a scene I had seen in a film, of galley slaves broken and dispirited, bending under the lash. And I was to be one of these . . . Happy, invigorating thought.

The extraordinary little man with the toupé fascinated me. He appeared to be one in authority, for reporters would come up to him and be subjected to a stream of instructions mixed with swear words and other abuse. Then a boy brought a tray to the man with the toupé. It was placed on the horse-shoe table, facing the bowed heads of the sub-editors. The bewildering little man then took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, sat down, planted his elbows on the table and began

eating a lamb chop with his fingers. He smeared the fat all over his straggly moustache, which he would draw into his mouth and suck with loud noises, indicative of pleasure. I shuddered. No one showed any displeasure. More will be heard of the man with the toupé and nothing shall be said to dishonour him.

The heat was stifling. No windows were open in the vast room. The Night Editor, who always curiously enough came on duty in the day time, has his desk under a window and he apparently disliked fresh air.

In those days the offices in the *Express* looked out on Shoe Lane, a little dingy street from which came sounds of hammering most of the waking hours. Bill Breething, the tiny man with a large head, was buried beneath a pile of cables and agency messages. From time to time he would lift his head and shoot these papers at my foreign sub-editorial brethren, with such cryptic instructions as " Make that a Light Splash " . . . " Make that a ' B.' " I had no idea what he was talking about.

I waited shivering for my turn to come. It came. Breething threw a sheaf of cables at me and said, " Make this a thirty-five," and bent anew to his excavation feats. Heads were bent . . . pencils were scribbling, scratching out, headlines were written and tossed into the basket.

Naturally the Chief Foreign Sub thought that as I had been taken on as a sub I had had some grounding in the work. What was a " thirty-

five"? Miserably I surveyed the mass in front of me . . . some emanation from Cairo, I saw. I at least knew personally the place where the news came from, if that was any help. I dared not ask, "What is a thirty-five?" And yet something had to be done.

Sitting by my side was a burly man, with great breadth of shoulder and a leonine head and a deeply lined face. His name was Harold Lake . . . alas, he died a few years later and I was to find out that he was a scholar of brilliance and that one of his claims to fame was that he had written the words of the famous song, "I Hear You Calling Me." He was a disillusioned man, who never reached the height to which his attainments entitled him. One of the many human tragedies of Fleet Street. I was to know more of them very soon. And learn a sobering lesson.

I looked at Lake closely. I saw that his face was kind, if stern, and that he was about fifty years of age. Well, there was nothing for it.

"Excuse me, please," I said timidly. "What do I do with all this and what is a 'thirty-five'?"

Lake looked up for the first time. Till that moment, although I had been seated beside him for twenty-five minutes, he had been apparently unaware of my presence. He appeared surprised and a trifle irritated.

"A thirty-five," he said gruffly, "is a story with a single-line heading. A story of two short paragraphs at the most. Boil that stuff down to two paragraphs, and get the whole story into it. Write

a single heading and put it in the basket." And he returned to his muttons.

The cable before me must have cost at least thirty-five pounds. There were twenty sheets of it. Down to two paragraphs! Well, if Lord Beaverbrook's money was to be wasted like this, it was not my business.

Luckily God has given me the faculty of swift perception and the art of condensing a vocal story into a few sentences. Owing to my slight impediment, I had made myself condense automatically. Here was a blessing out of a curse. It would now serve me well.

I read the cables through five times, extracted the essential facts, crossed out pounds worth of words, wrote a heading and passed it to Breething. He looked at it. And threw it back to me. "Heading too long," he said. "Can't be over twenty-one letters. Heading must tell a story."

I tried again. Seven times Breething threw the slip back at me. At last I got a heading which satisfied him. He sighed and passed me a short message of seventeen lines. "Make that a Splash," he said. "Three headings. Don't cut it."

Oh, my heavens, what was a "Splash"? It was beyond me to ask any more. My colleagues were not there to teach me my job. So I watched. I saw the difference in headings . . . a great number of them there are . . . and copied the style. It was terribly difficult. Every heading had a different number of letters in the head. Some stories had to be degutted and re-written.

Some stories had to be turned upside down with the final paragraph brought to the top. There were such ghastlinesses as "Streamers," "Drop Letters," and "Indenting" and other horrors.

Breething was a marvel of patience with me. So were the other fellows. My hours of work were from half-past four in the afternoon till midnight. Every day this monotonous work went on, cutting stories to ribbons, writing "cute" headlines (a real art in itself), altering, re-writing . . . stretching an aching back . . . taking sips at strong cups of tea. I grew more accustomed to the work as the time went on. But I hated this hole. It was so monotonous, so destructive. Was this the glamorous life of journalism? The atmosphere of that room was choking.

My working hours made it imperative for me entirely to alter my whole mode of life, the life to which I had been accustomed. Gone was the Playboy of the West End world. It is one thing to come home on leave with full pay and nothing to do but enjoy oneself, and very much another thing to keep it up on Five Pounds a week, even if there had been time. I rarely reached home till one o'clock in the morning . . . and I was so tired that I slept till lunch time the following day. Lunch was my only meal of social possibilities, for at half-past four I had to be seated on that uncomfortable bench, helping to fill a newspaper for the populace to read at breakfast or in a million suburban trains.

London hostesses at that period had lists on

which were written the names of desirable young men . . . desirable in that they were young, were men and were capable of filling any ballroom, any dinner-table during the season. I had been on that list for some years. Invitation cards still came showering upon me informing me that Lady So and So desired the inestimable privilege of my presence at her "At Home," Dinner Party, Ball, Theatre Party, on a certain date. Some of these kind people I knew well and I had spent many happy hours dancing and drinking champagne in their mansions. Many I did not know at all, and they certainly did not know me. I was "on the list" and thus could with safety be counted upon to make adequate conversation, to take in a simpering debutante to dinner and not to wear a black waistcoat with a tail coat.

But now, whether I knew the givers of London's parties or not, I was forced to refuse their invitations. Sometimes I did try after my work to dash home and change, and join the playboys and playgirls as of yore, but there was something so dreary about changing into evening clothes after midnight, and something so physically exhausting, that I had to decide.

It either had to be "This," or "That." Not both. So I refused all these invitations. As time went on fewer invitations came, and my mantelpiece was bare. I was soon forgotten. I was of no further use. So far as Society was concerned I was dead, and my dropping out stirred not the

smallest ripple on the surface. Here endeth another lesson.

My small flat filled me with dreariness. The dingy courtyard which surrounded this vast block of buildings was at night illuminated by three street lamps. They cast a fitful beam over the asphalt. . . . The outlook from my windows gave me the refreshment of thousands of black chimneys, and relays of little flats with dirty white lace curtains and washing hung out to dry. I tried to make my flat as homely as possible, but it was not easy. Nowadays I look back on those days with a shudder and wonder how I put up with them. Some nights I would come back from the office, clanging up those horrible steps, worn out and dispirited. I seemed to have given up all that I liked and all the people I cared for. I could never see my friends, or go with them on gay jaunts or smoke a friendly cigar after dinner. My work did not seem to offer me any scope for the future . . . I had not been allowed to write one line in the *Daily Express*, just subbing all the small stories and the markets . . . the foreign cables bringing me memories of all the places I had visited and the fun I had had. The sedentary life spent in so thick an atmosphere upset my digestion, which had been sufficiently upset by my illnesses out East. I was no one of any account in my office . . . just like a convict with a number.

Three times I came to the conclusion that I could not go on with this life. I could not grow accustomed to the work or to many of the people.

I had never worked for a machine before. I had always worked directly for a human being. But yet I made myself stick it out. For one reason that if I chucked up this job, which I was extremely lucky to have got . . . I would have the devil's own trouble in finding another. My relatives continued to show no interest in my welfare, and I was damned if I was going to them for help. My rich, influential friends would, I daresay, have thrown me a " bone," but I clung on to my pride with both hands.

I arrived at the office one day and was told that Mr. R. D. Blumenfeld, the Editor in Chief, wished to see me. Mr. Blumenfeld, who is a great journalist and is now in honoured retirement, had been away in New York when Baxter had taken me on. What did he want with me, so tiny a link in the chain ? Nervously, for the late hours of work and the unaccustomed surroundings had made me jumpy and fearful, I obeyed the summons in trepidation.

Mr. Blumenfeld, known wherever journalists gather together as " R.D.B.," told me to sit down. Shrewd, perceptive, with a wide knowledge of men, this was the Editor who was making the *Daily Express* into a force. He was reputed to be a bit of a tartar, but I knew at a glance that here was a man who would appreciate candour, one who had no time for excuses or for a shoddy worker.

" I have been looking down the list of staff, Knox," he said. " I have to do some cutting down.

I see that Baxter took you on . . . What experience have you had ? "

" None at all," I replied, " of journalism. But I am picking up things quickly and doing my best."

A crease showed round those kindly eyes of R.D.B.'s. " I had decided to dispense with your services," he said, " for we cannot afford to teach people their jobs, you know, when I thought I would see you first. And to-day I had a letter from my old friend, George Lloyd, about you. He seems to have a high opinion of you. But tell me why I should not sack you ? "

So here it was. The sack. It was good of Lloyd to write. These people did not want me. They had no time to train men. And why should they ? Fleet Street was full of competent journalists who would have come laughing and dancing into my shoes. Though under the regulations no trained journalist can be paid less than the minimum wage, Nine Guineas a week. And I was getting Five Pounds.

" Look here, sir," I said. " Give me a chance. Five Pounds won't break the firm, and I'm young and I know I can write. I KNOW I shall do well some day, if I get my chance here. Mr. Baxter was good enough to see something in me."

" Baxter is the Father Christmas of this firm," said R.D.B. with a smile and relapsed into silence. " All right," he went on, " you can stay on. If you make good no one will be more pleased than myself."

Blumenfeld from that moment had my allegiance.

He looked tired, I thought, as would any man who had piloted a newspaper with such success all through a war, with a mere sprinkling of staff. Soon he would retire and a legend would hover over Fleet Street. For R.D.B. is one of those editors whose spirit and example lives on after they have gone . . . He had enjoyed the friendship and the confidence of Cabinet Ministers. His sound common sense and his wonderful sense of humour had made him trusted and respected.

During the war it was suggested to him that he should change his name . . . because it was German sounding. He refused. It was the name he had been born with. It was the name with which he would die. There you have the man.

Now he lives in his lovely house in the country and tends his garden, but still does grand work for journalistic charities. He may occasionally long again for the feel of the engines under his feet and the sight of his ship turning this way and that under his command, but I feel that there are varying aspects of present-day journalism of which he does not approve.

And he is content to sit back and watch, after a lifetime of labour and responsibility. For he was a giant in his day.

Whenever we meet he always shows interest in my welfare, and invariably he says, "A pity I did not give you the sack that day, young Knox." It is our very own joke, and long may R.D.B. be spared to crack it.

I was taken off the foreign desk and put on the

Home sub desk . . . and I now came directly under the eyes of the Chief Sub-Editor.

Sub-editors are a race apart. They are men who see all and say everything. They have the fate of reputations in their hands. An inaccurate statement allowed to pass into print without checking may start an international crisis. Sub-editors are the natural enemies of the reporter. It is the secret urge of any newspaper reporter to let himself go on paper. He gets a chance of showing what he can do in the way of descriptive writing and covers page after page with words which he is confident will ring through a million homes in the morning. With a sigh of triumph he hands in his copy to the Chief Sub-Editor. He can hardly wait till the paper comes out. When the paper does come out he sees that his saga had been reduced to three paragraphs by a disillusioned sub-editor, and degutted with a razor-edged knife. The Chief Sub throwing over the copy to a minion has said, " Just give the facts if you can find them. Cut out all that balderdash stuff. It's all in the evening papers anyway."

Reporters regard the subs as blood-sucking vampires, soulless and caring for no man. The sub regards the reporter as a curse and an offence to mankind, who inflicts his appalling handwriting upon them, is always late with a story and when the story does arrive, it is found to be a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing.

By the right elbow of each sub-editor is a " Spike." On this spike wads and wads of copy

are transfixed. Reporters see what they consider their masterpieces pressed down on this sharp gadget. The Spike is a great breaker of hearts and has deprived many a man of a superiority complex.

Sub-editors on London newspapers are highly paid men. Their knowledge has to be wide and their judgment dead right. In a flash, at a peak hour, they have to turn out a coherent story out of a mass of sheets of copy-paper, take in the essential facts in a glance, delete all repetition material and write vivid headlines. It is most unusual for a raw journalist to begin as a sub-editor on a big newspaper. I was lucky there . . . but it is no wonder that I felt sadly out of my depth.

I found myself wishing that they would not take life so seriously, these men. They never smiled round that horse-shoe table. Their backs were bowed and their brows furrowed. They never "let up" for a moment. These were the slaves who fed the mighty machine . . . taking immense care that no material which was unsuitable or dangerous should get into the wheels and cogs.

While the reporters went out north, south, east and west, there, sitting waiting at the desk, were the sub-editors. Waiting for the fruit of the reporter's art to be handed to them . . . then to be pounced upon, torn asunder, re-written, re-spelled, and generally rendered unrecognisable to the vendors thereof.

But why couldn't they smile? Sometimes I

felt that if someone did not make a laughing remark to me, I would go mad. Everyone seemed so afraid . . . The *Daily Express* is vastly different these days. So I and my brother junior sub, Bill Thompson, who has turned out a brilliant journalist and is now the *Daily Express* Special Correspondent in New York, determined, though it cost us our jobs, that we would impart a certain liveliness into the proceedings. We made audible and devastating comments on the news put before us. We wrote headings with frightening double meanings and passed them up the table. We chatted to our colleagues and wished them "good morning," "good afternoon," and "good evening." Unheard of frivolity! We were sick of working in a morgue.

The atmosphere did alter considerably. Even the stern-visaged Farthing, the Night Editor, would relax and joke with us. I had a respect for this man—his integrity and high purpose commanded respect. He was mad on cricket. So every evening, in the course of my work, I would get up and walk across to where the silent Farthing was correcting proofs . . . much to the horror of my colleagues who apparently expected me to be struck dead by so big a wig. I would then chat to him about cricket and ask him to tell me what he thought of such and such a batsman. I always chose the busiest hour of the day. The trick always worked. Farthing's lined face would crack in a smile—as with most forbidding-looking men his smile was charming—and he would put down his proofs, take off

his glasses and give me a lecture on Hobbs. Suddenly he would come to himself and sternly order me back to my seat . . . with a twinkle where before there had been no twinkle. It was impossible really to get to know this shy, reserved man, but I think he liked me. And I made him laugh now and then.

Two years afterwards news came through to the office that Farthing . . . it was a beautiful summer day . . . had died of heart failure on the cricket field. He was getting on for fifty-three, and the heat of the day was too much for him. He was taking his stand at the wicket when he fell down dead. His son was in the team. He telephoned the office and asked if some member of the Staff could come down in case anything could be done. And I was sent down . . . for it was felt that Farthing " would have liked it."

One does not forget such moments. I was thankful that this kindly man, who helped and encouraged me when I was lonely and ignorant of my work, died as he would have longed to have died. On the cricket field. He was happiest when, with the sun beating down from the sky, he took his place on a fair green field and hit the bowler for a six.

The Farthings of Fleet Street are few and far between. While they live they make little stir and when they die there are no comets seen. But these upright and religious men, as Farthing so truly was, by their quiet self-control, their assured sense of what is right and what is wrong, guide

many a ship safely clear of the rocks and are an inestimable tower of strength to those who are fortunate enough to employ them. Their names are not widely known and their deeds are not sung in rhyme or in story. But they are always there. Always reliable, loyal and generous of heart, cautious and yet unafraid.

The Chief Sub-Editor, Vaughan Wilkins, was an extraordinary man. Yet he, like Farthing, holds a place in my memory. Wilkins had served throughout the war and was, to put it mildly, temperamental. His job is enough to fray the nerves of the stoutest warrior. The Chief Sub-Editor has to say what shall go into the paper and what shall go on the Spike . . . He has to have an unfailing sense for the value of news . . . be able to smell the cunning hand of a publicity agent a mile away, and have the faculty of remembering every story in every other paper that day and that evening. He must weigh every story in the balance and weigh it with lightning rapidity.

In his mind he has to visualise the whole lay-out of the paper. If a " lead " story falls down at the last moment, either through a matter of last-minute policy or the failure of a reporter to get his man, the Chief Sub has immediately to decide on a substitute story. The Lead story is the chief story of the day. To occupy that noble position the news has to be important, accurate, and must not only be sensational in itself but must please the General Manager, the Circulation Manager, the Advertising Department, the Editor, and the

Proprietor . . . this last being a feat which is practically impossible of achievement.

No wonder such an executive grows nervy. Wilkins found time to give me lessons in subbing and make up of a page . . . he had a genius for the "display" of a page. He told me why certain headings would not do and why they would. And he taught me to disregard the blandishments of reporters and to spot a "fake" story in a flash. To him I owe a lot. Sometimes he would become so enraged that he would bite clean through a pipe. I have seen him break twenty-two pencils in an evening in sheer fury. He was impatient beyond belief. And patient beyond belief. A big story would so excite him that he would dance up and down in his chair . . . a foolish mistake by one of his long-suffering staff would drive him to madness. But he was just and of considerable understanding. He wore himself out unnecessarily.

He asked me once whether I would drive down with him to his country cottage for a week-end. He had taken me under his wing. He gave me the Sunday off. We set off in a Morris Oxford coupé at one o'clock in the morning, after the office—in a snowstorm. We arrived at half-past five. I was dead tired and freezing with cold. The house was in pitch darkness. There was no key and the temperature was below freezing point. We broke a window. The house was icy cold. I slept on a bed with two blankets, a motor rug and the hardest pillow on record for my head. Wilkins curled up

on another bed and threw open all the windows. Next evening we set off back home . . . more than a hundred and fifty miles, after what, in his view, was a refreshing week-end.

He was the most unexpected chap. He still is. A confirmed bachelor, he suddenly adventured on marriage with a very charming girl. She understands his ways and his moods in miraculous fashion. Then he resigned from the *Express*, having become Assistant Editor, joined the *News Chronicle*, left in a flaming temper, and went out to Texas, God knows why. He returned, and out of the blue wrote a "Best Seller"—"And So Victoria," into which he put all his enthusiasm, his intolerance, his whirlwind moods and the red corpuscles of his buccaneering ancestors.

His book caused a sensation. It has already been translated into every language worth speaking and made its author, at a bound, a best-selling name.

Nothing that Bill Wilkins does will surprise me. He has too many brains. His great handicap. He is a maddening, impossible and an essentially lovable character.

Fleet Street abounds in "characters." For the student of nature, the life of a newspaper man offers untold opportunities for study. The Street is full of men who are content not to make any mark, but who are happy so long as they draw their modest wage each week and avoid responsibility. They are in the most uncertain profession in the world. Not even excluding the stage and the films. The

weakest go to the wall and the wives and families go to the wall too. Some of the herd play for safety, and they deliberately squash their latent talents. They would rather be "safe" doing their jobs well . . . quiet but important jobs . . . than suddenly be blazoned forth as a new discovery, be blazoned across the buses, live their little day and then fade out. Who shall blame them?

I never scoff at any man in Fleet Street who shrinks from responsibility, who hides away from promotion. Probably he has too much to lose. The moment a man is marked down, picked out from the herd and plumped on a pinnacle, he has got to remain on that pinnacle. No excuses will be accepted if he even sways in the wind. The second he fails to live up to his luck, down he will crash from his perch. No one will hold out a blanket to break his fall. It may be a wonderful life while it lasts with public applause ringing in the ears and a pleasant salary dropping into the bank, but in the end it is bound to tell on the health and the nerves. The anxiety of keeping "there" after you have got "there"—to any person of temperament—is weary beyond belief.

There is a thrill indeed in what is called fame. Or notoriety or whatever it is . . . but the man is a fool and a nit-wit who allows it to go to his head. But I often wonder if there is not considerably more happiness and peace of mind in a comfortable anonymity, on a comfortable income, in comfortable health. Secure from prying eyes.

I chafed bitterly under my first year and a half

on that sub's desk. I was bored to nausea with reading millions of words of other people's work —of slashing and cutting . . . cutting and slashing. I had got on quickly enough with the work and pleased Wilkins. At times Baxter would saunter past the table and with his incredible charm of manner he would enquire how I was " getting on." I would murmur, " All right, thank you," and he would smile like a beneficent high priest and give me an all-enveloping benediction. All the time he knew that I was longing to be started on reporterial work. And be able to WRITE something myself, for others to hack to bits.

Often when I was in a tussle with some refractory copy and Wilkins was demanding how much longer I'd be, such gods as H. V. Morton and Hannen Swaffer descended from their thrones and entered the news room. With longing eyes I gazed at them. For here indeed were names with which to conjure. They were in receipt of more money per week than I earned per year . . . Would I ever be like them? Would anyone ever nudge his—or indeed her neighbour—and whisper, " That's Collie Knox, you know " ? My copy was forgotten and I followed these men with envious eyes as they stood surveying the room. Lords of all they surveyed.

Harry Morton is a wonderful writer. He has the gift of description tremendously developed. He will attend a national ceremony with every other newspaper star writer, and he will notice that a shy little woman in black with a medal

ribbon pinned on her breast is sobbing in a corner. While the other writers will concentrate on the obvious high lights, the pomp and splendour, Harry Morton will hang his story on the little woman in black. Instantly she will stand out as the central figure and she will live before the reader.

I remember once Morton was sent to write the experiences of a man who had climbed to the top of St. Paul's Cathedral. When I read his description the next day in the paper I literally felt giddy . . . so vivid is his power of writing.

His books sell in millions, and he is still unequalled in his own field. He remains the same quiet, charming man. Unspoiled. I knew that Baxter had a few tussles with " H.V." If he did not think that a story was worthy of his time or his talent, he would refuse to go out on it. Baxter once said that he would rather deal with a temperamental prima donna than with H.V. when he was in that mood. But Baxter was eminently capable of dealing with any prima donna. He could wheedle a cork out of a bottle.

Hannen Swaffer is, I consider, indescribable, and altogether beyond anything and anyone except himself. Hannen is a law unto Swaffer and has been ever since the days when he was one of the few people who dared to stand up to Lord Northcliffe, who christened him " the poet." In those days when I was subbing at high pressure, Swaffer was the most powerful force in newspaper land. His column could make and unmake reputations. He could not make or mar theatrical productions.

No man can do that . . . but he could come dangerously near it. Actors and actresses used to open the *Express* with fear and trembling to see what Swaffer had to say. He was bitter, sarcastic, withering, laudatory and sulphuric by turns. He is the prime debunker. Ask him to do your actor sixth cousin a favour and he will bite your head off. Next day he will write that the performance in the play of your sixth cousin was an offence against decency. He will not be coerced, cajoled. He is still that way. He has to be free to praise or condemn . . . but Swaffer is a rebel against hypocrisy. And against boot-lickers.

His appearance is unique in itself . . . his carelessly tied black stock, his blue suits covered with cigarette ash and his locks waving defiantly in the wind. People either loathe Swaffer or delight in him. The compositors and linotype operators all liked Swaffer. There was no side about him. He is that rare type of star journalist, he does not mind his copy being cut. He had been an editor himself . . . he had been most things in Fleet Street and knew that no one can get a column and a half into one column of space. If he writes too much he expects to be cut down and never complains.

I recall one very high paid writer throwing several fits in the News Room because one of his stories had been, as he put it, " murdered." Swaffer was standing by dropping cigarette ash over all and sundry, and was heard to murmur, " Poor bloody fool," which did not make for peace in our time.

HANNEN SWAFFER.

[*To face p.* 320.

He is uncompromisingly direct. So long as he was left alone to do what he thought right, he was no trouble to his Editor. The moment any human being attempted to boss him, Swaffer would walk out. No man has walked out of, or into, more jobs. A sublime self-assurance, a will of granite, and a seemingly devastating cynicism goes to form the make-up of this extraordinary man.

Whatever happens in Fleet Street, there will never be another Swaffer. He is scornful of boys with public school educations who think they can write and know not their world. He writes with vitriol in his pen. Too much so sometimes. He is occasionally too unkind and often when reviewing a play he would show a sublime disinterestedness in all he surveyed. One day Robert Loraine, whose wife, Winnie Loraine, is so brilliant a journalist and so staunch a friend, put on "Cyrano" and the scenery fell all over Loraine's head on the first night. Instead of praising Loraine's very fine performance, Swaffer wrote in his review around the falling scenery and made that incident his peg for his story.

I was too small fry for Swaffer to speak to me, not that he had any conceit in that way. But I just did not come within his vision. But I was determined to speak to him. Often when I was on late, subbing Swaffer's copy—his review would be handed to me to sub—to put headings on. He would stroll round the desk and take up his stand behind me and watch me as I struggled to write a suitable heading to please the great man.

I would write one. A snort behind me and a shower of ash cascaded down my neck. Hastily I would consign my effort to the waste paper basket. After several attempts I would hit on a heading which passed muster and he would murmur, "That'll do, boy." On these occasions I became jittery with nerves.

One day I ran Swaffer to earth while he was washing his hands. I spoke to him. He grunted. I then made some remark about a play. Turning to me he said, "Don't talk such nonsense, boy. They can't deceive me. *I know.*" Swaffer always knows everything. Or says he does. In fact, he does know a vast deal, which confounds his detractors . . . for he stumps them easily. It is impossible to argue with Swaffer. He never argues. He states opinions and before that flood of oratory no man can stand up. And live. Swaffer is a non-stop performance.

He finished his ablutions and said to me unexpectedly, "You stammer, don't you, boy? Don't argue with me. Listen to me. I stammered once" —(he still does slightly)—"and I cured myself. You can cure yourself. Get self-confidence . . . get confidence in yourself and your work, and so long as you feel you are right, don't give a damn for anyone. You envy me, don't you?"

I replied that I did. Swaffer nodded.

"So do a lot of other damned fools. You'll be all right, boy." And patting my shoulder, a curiously un-Swafferish gesture, he withdrew.

He gave me a great lift-up that day. After our

little talk he would always have a word with me and I grew to like him. He has a heart underneath all the cigarette ash, and I often wonder why he goes to so much trouble to hide it.

He still looks on me as a boy and I still listen to him holding forth and hold my peace . . . but there is a twinkle in my left eye which I rather think escapes his notice. He is entirely self-contained.

One night an actress at the Savoy Grill, who had suffered, and justly, from Swaffer's pen, came up to him, and in full view of the whole room, slapped Swaff's face. The report rang through the night. The slapped gazed at the slapper as at some curious insect . . . lit a cigarette, and looking her straight in the eye, remarked, " Poor silly bitch," and went out and wrote a terrific story for his own newspaper on the incident.

No, when Swaff departs this life there will come to light many instances of so-far unrecorded kindnesses, little deeds done with a defiant attitude as if daring the recipient to tell a soul or even to murmur a " thank you."

He never takes a holiday. He works all day and most of the night. His job is his life. He lives in a flat high up overlooking Trafalgar Square, and I wager flicks cigarettes all over Nelson. He will die as he lives, in harness . . . His attitude to his profession was summed up by a remark he made to me. " Why any newspaper is prepared to pay me several thousand pounds a year for writing what I want to write, is beyond me. But then all

newspaper proprietors are mad. Don't argue with me, boy. I KNOW."

I am told that the only time when anyone has seen Swaffer awaking to any emotion was when he saw my name flaming across the sides of eight omnibuses. The sight shook him so much that he wrote an article about me, an article I shall always treasure . . . it was kindly, it was generous, and at the end of it there was such a sting in its tail as would incapacitate an ox. Or a Knox.

Such is Swaffer. He will hand you a rose with one hand and knock you head over heels with the other.

He is too bitter, I feel, and fine journalist though he still is, he will not allow that to write of the things . . . the simple things . . . of life is not necessarily either to write "slop" or to write down to people. He does not put the value he should on the eternal, the ordinary emotions.

He once wrote an article and said, "I do not know for whom Collie Knox writes." A Swafferism, but it meant nothing . . . He knew perfectly well. I wish he would learn . . . for not even Swaff is too old or too experienced to learn . . . that it is happier for all men to grow old graciously.

But he was kind to me when I needed kindness. And I have a way of being grateful and of taking a man as I find him.

In Trevor Wignall I found another personality —of equal fearlessness . . . but Trevor is a great champion of his fellow men. If ever there was a feeling of resentment in the office on the part of

the inarticulate majority, Trevor Wignall would always rush in and constitute himself champion. He had a hatred of injustice . . . and still has, this whirlwind of a Welshman.

Names . . . names . . . How I was wont to regard them with awe. But there is not much security at the top of a ladder.

A ladder can wobble.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RETICENCE is an admirable virtue and one on which the British race prides itself. But like the roast beef which is served up to the visitor to English country inns on a Sunday, the virtue can be overdone.

Heaven forbid that the wearing of hearts upon sleeves should become a fashion. Like catching pneumonia at funerals. We will leave it to the laundries, who understand such revelations, to take in our neighbours' washing. Any form of exhibitionism is abhorrent to me if only because exhibitionism is too often self-expression carried to sex-excess. Oscar Wilde had it that nothing succeeds like excess. But here is just a clever gag meaning nothing except just what it should not mean. Excess in any vice or virtue is tiresome and uncomfortable. The man who over-talks, drinks, smokes, eats or indulges in promiscuous pleasures is a fool and therefore to be pitied. An untidy, stupid fellow. Moreover, a bore.

It is not well, by the same token, to make too much of a virtue of reticence. If we do not learn from our own experiences, we can at least allow others to profit by them. I see no sense in keeping everything to oneself . . . everything that matters . . . for we are assuredly put into this world to

help others as much, and perhaps more, than ourselves. If we cover up our natural errors and unhappinesses how then can we be of assistance to others who stumble and fall? The perfect guide is the guide who has been over every inch of the route himself and knows from experience just what pit-holes to avoid. He has found his way. Can anyone find his way without having first lost it? It does not make sense.

Into my life came what I now look upon as a dream: with haunting musical accompaniment. There was nothing strange about this interlude of mine—though interlude is not the word—for, after all, I was only sharing a widely shared experience. But fashionable people, I believe, do not talk about "that sort of thing" except in hushed whispers and then only to the family doctor scattering his bedside manna.

Briefly, I fell in love. As the capricious little god had waited till I was thirty years old to ping an arrow at me, the arrow hit me good and proper; where it hurt most.

I have no qualms about recording that I fell in love or about admitting that the ending to the story was fated to be far from blissful. Maybe the play was badly written, indifferently acted and carelessly produced. Otherwise surely the final curtain would have fallen on a happy ending with every prospect ahead of marital gladness. A great popular success would be assured and the audience would go home well satisfied.

As I am endeavouring honestly to write of my

life and all it has brought and denied to me, why should I boggle at including an experience which has left its imprints clearly and definitely upon my consciousness? No doubt some of my friends and relatives may murmur, "Really, I do think Collie might have left that chapter out." And then they will go to their homes and open cupboard after cupboard, just to make quite sure that none of the family skeletons has escaped during their absence. Skeletons can do with an airing before the moths get at them.

Johnnie was very charming, gay and pretty, with a slim, boyish figure and an upturned nose. She was eighteen years old. We met while staying at a house of a great mutual friend of ours, one of the most enchanting women in the world, Mrs. Hugh Stobart. In Yorkshire it was. Why this girl should have had a peculiar effect on me I know not. Though I had met a great many girls in my travels, and many exceedingly attractive ones, I was never conscious of my heart missing a beat. I had walked and talked with girls 'neath tropical skies, on board ships, on summer evenings, down by the "poop." A dangerous thing the poop —and I had dallied in ballrooms galore. My pulse had never quickened. Indeed, young girls had never had anything more than a momentary attraction for me, because I found them difficult to talk to. Their conversation ran on rails like little wayward railways, stopping at little stations by the wayside . . . the Opera station, the Royal Academy, Ascot, debutante dances, possible and impossible

young men, the latest play, musical comedy, jazz tune, and dance band leader junctions.

I had always delighted far more in the company of women older than myself, or at least of the same age. I still do. For they have experience, matured charm, are wise and cautious and are not for ever expecting me to go into swoons of ecstasy over new hats. Neither do they colour their tongues bright yellow, nor gaze with hard cold eyes on a world which has been put there, in their own estimation, so that they can plunder and devour so long as the eye-black sticks to their faces.

Full speed ahead they go, these girls, while the going is good . . . with their tight little faces and tight little hearts . . . their imagination as narrow as their pelvis.

But Johnnie was " different." It is not to be believed that the reader will not smile at my claim. For of course I have fallen into the age-old trap which catches all who come its way. Who is not " different " to the eyes of the love-blinded beholder? If love is not blind, it at least causes acute astigmatism.

Anyway I felt at my ease with this girl. She played a good game of tennis and hit the ball like a boy and did not scream shrilly when she missed it. We were neither of us conscious of any feeling of restraint in our conversation. There were no awkward pauses. And, above all, we laughed at the same jokes. Which means that we laughed at one another's jokes.

The Archbishop of Canterbury would make his

tenure of office really notable were he to press for legislation for the question, " Do you laugh at the same jokes " to be included in the Marriage Service.

On receiving the reply of " No " the officiating clergyman would dismiss the intended bride and bridegroom to their homes and wash his hands of the whole business. Receiving the answer " Yes," the clergyman would feel more certain that these whom he, in the name of God, joined together, would remain together at any rate till the following quarter day.

But I see no hope of any Archbishop, however broadminded, introducing this all-important test question into the Marriage Service. What on earth would happen to the receipts at St. Margaret's, Westminster? And all those red carpets.

I remember Johnnie and I played a game of tennis one summer morning, for that afternoon I had to go back to London. We sat on a heavily chintzed sofa after our game, in our tennis clothes. We sipped orangeade. For a change neither of us said a word. And suddenly I was filled with intense anger that I was forced to go away and leave this winning little companion of mine. I looked at her out of the corner of my right eye. She was curled up like a kitten and looked very serious, she with her tip-tilted nose. Damn my job, I thought. And damn my lack of money, and damn everything that was happening to me. Very odd. The expert will recognise the signs.

I left for the station in the family car and Johnnie was not there at the front door to see me off. I

was glad, for I desired nothing more than to be alone and to think over this sudden "thing" which had happened to me. It would pass, of course. But it did not pass.

Some months afterwards we became engaged. Both of us were in love. All my friends told me first that I was mad, and secondly that it was idiotic to expect any girl to share the life I was leading at that moment. Thirdly they hoped I would be very happy . . . this last with a smirk of commiseration which I found embarrassing.

The marriage was very much arranged. Our engagement was announced in *The Times* and the *Morning Post* and a ring, which I could ill afford, encircled the accepted finger of my intended wife. We wrote to one another . . . her home was in Durham . . . and I did my work as best I could, alternating between acute exhilaration and graveyard despondency.

One morning there came a letter. My fiancée "broke it off." Why, she did not really know. I do not think she knows to this day. But I know —now. It was not to be expected that a man of my nature would take this kind of blow in his stride. It bowled me out. I could not work or think or do anything. I became definitely ill and had to stay away from the office. And of course I railed and cursed. As people have railed and cursed in such situations since Adam winked at Eve.

I understood that the right thing for a man to do in such a situation was to go and shoot elephants

in Africa. The prospect did not appeal. Anyway I had already shot an elephant and most other beasts in Africa and I never believed in repeating experiences. Neither did I vow that never again would I trust a woman or any nonsense of that kind. I did what I think was the only, is the only, thing to do. I went back to work. And I worked harder than ever, with concentrated energy, though maybe with a furrowed brow.

I am not surprised Johnnie felt she could not face marriage. She was so young. She lived in a comfortable country home. She had not had any of the real excitements of life, and she had, without fully realising it, tentatively tied herself up with a man who was at that time earning eight pounds a week. A man who would be away from home every day from four o'clock in the afternoon till one o'clock in the morning. She foresaw that she could not live up to this kind of test . . . not at her age. And she duly acted on her convictions.

It was an experience for both of us. We are excellent friends to this day. We still laugh at the same jokes and her nose still turns up in its wonted, fascinating way.

My circumstances are very different now to what they were " then." But had Johnnie not been brave enough to fear the issue . . . I use the words deliberately . . . would I be where I am now? Wherever that may be. It is open to doubt. No one can recapture the first fine careless rapture and neither my very good friend nor myself have been foolish enough to try.

Neither of us has married. Some people say to me, "Ah" in long, sighy voices and get out of range before I can kick them. When I can find any girl whose personality induces me once more to say to myself, "Damn my job, damn everything," I shall doubtless ask her to marry me. So far none has come my way. Perhaps when Johnnie finds someone whom she will not "see off" when he goes away after a happy week-end in the country, she, also, will enter the state of matrimony. She is older now—and bolder. And as delightful as ever.

It is possible to have gone through times of the highest emotional tension with another human being and after the tension relaxes and the emotion softens, to remain the best of good friends. If any boy or girl who reads these words can gather heart from such an experience as is mine, I shall be deeply glad. It is not necessary to shoot lions or elephants in Africa . . . or to cover one's head in a dust-sheet and look pale and uninteresting in corners.

I never can understand why it is considered so dreadful to talk to a fellow being about his or her engagement which has been broken off. Presumably the couple concerned knew what they were doing. Obstacles turned up at the last moment . . . the risks were too heavy . . . there was too much or too little money . . . and a mutual promise was mutually or otherwise broken. Here is no reason to walk about the house on tiptoe and talk as if the undertaker were already swilling down the best sherry in the next room.

I am often asked if I shall ever marry. Of all questions this is the most half-witted. How in God's name do I know? The reason I have not married is obvious. I wanted once to marry a girl with a snub nose. The idea proved abortive and no one shall be blamed. I desire no second-best. And I would rather be alone than marry because it is the thing to do, because I am lonely, or because I may be lonely in the years to come. Maybe I am not meant to marry. Not everyone is. And loneliness dwells within us all.

What I do resent is the habit of this curious age which divides the married and the unmarried into the sheep and the goats. The gossips and the idle chatterers and the uncountable array of undiluted bitches of both sexes who infest the city of London, find a hundred different reasons for the " bachelordom " of men and women.

If the men are youngish, of passable looks, with a good job, earning reasonable money and especially if they are in the public eye, every imaginable gutter is scoured by the gutter-minded. They are said to hate women, to indulge in secret in most of the vices of the Roman Emperors, to practise dark and dirty deeds of depravity, and to take large helpings of cocaine and heroin as a breakfast dish. If a girl shares " digs " with another girl, every repressed virgin within one hundred miles gives a salacious hiccough.

It does not strike these prurient-minded plagues that, unlike themselves, there do exist people who prefer to remain unmarried, not necessarily out of

selfishness or because of a prediliction towards peculiar sex habits, but out of unselfishness. A man who has gone a number of years in his own way and whose deepest feelings have not been aroused or revived knows that maybe he is past the time when he could make a woman happy. His work has grown to take up too much of his time. He is ambitious. He likes his own way, and pretty speeches do not come easily to him. A woman craves attention and care and tact. It is unfair for a man to enter upon a marriage with a woman with any mental or physical reservations. Far better that the man who is honest with himself should think twice before entering on any obligation which he cannot, with the best will in the world, fulfil. In the spirit as well as the letter of the law.

The women who remain unmarried more often than not do so because " once they had a love and lost him." Maybe they have poured out their love on a worthless being whose constant faults they have as constantly forgiven, until they could forgive no more. And they abide with their memories. Death may have taken away the one they loved, and rather than give another man only half a heart they elect to stay alone. These women are honest with themselves. They have had so much to give to the right man. When the right man has come and gone . . . or till the right man arrives, they are content to be alone. To wait for a time . . . to wait for ever.

My tale of my engagement is but a tale told daily

in a million lives . . . year by year. To some of us these things happen—to others they just do not happen. Such twists and turns of fate are inevitable.

I hope I have not embarrassed anybody?

That would be just too bad.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AT last I was free from the purgatory of the sub-editorial desk. I was made a reporter. It is the habit . . . it was once my habit . . . of hundreds of worthy citizens to open their newspaper in the morning, prop it up against the toast rack and gaze at it with bleary and disbelieving eyes. Turning rapidly over the pages they remark "Nothing in the damned paper this morning" and consider they have said something clever.

In those words are dismissed with a shrug the combined energies, brains, talents, foresight and enterprise of thousands of their fellows. The onlooker at the newspaper world does not see most of the game. He sees none of it.

The newspaper which a bored boy on a bicycle delivers to hotel, club, mansion, or cottage not only represents the directed talents of a mighty organisation but also the expenditure, and the wastage, of thousands upon thousands of pounds. To "get" that story which is so summarily scanned, and rejected, by the reader, men have spent days and nights of ceaseless endeavour. They have followed trails which have led them to a dead end . . . they have travelled by motor car and aeroplane and ship. . . . They have been snubbed, insulted,

flattered, cajoled and abused in turns. And they have withstood bribery, threats and illness so often resulting from exposure to the elements and irregular and hastily gobbled meals. At last they have landed their story. They think nothing of the vicissitudes through which they passed in order to do their alloted job. They consider anything worth while so long as their story is a better story than that of their rival newspapers.

Once they have handed in their copy to the News Editor, they sit down patiently till they shall be summoned once more to venture forth here, there and everywhere, to feed the mighty, ever-hungry machines which even now are roaring and throbbing beneath their desks. All this in order that their readers may not consider their pennies to be wasted and so that their proprietors may look upon their babies in the morning and see that they are good.

Men in every country of the world are ceaselessly scouring for news. Cables flash from every corner telling of disasters, marriages, a new crisis, a threatened war, a strike, a land in revolution. At home the reporters spend days and nights gouging out secrets, cementing contacts useful to them, questioning, ever questioning . . . leaving no human emotion to rest . . . often hating themselves for poking their noses into the innermost privacies of human failings and hopes and dreads, but ever carrying on because it is their job to "get the news."

Thus is every honour satisfied—except, on occasions—their own.

Reporters are frequently reviled because to them

nothing appears sacred, because to them the reminiscences of a particularly foul murderer are of more value than the latest invention of a scientific genius in Muswell Hill. They are not, of course, of more value to them as human beings —these meanderings of a murderer, but they are definitely of more news value. The public eagerly reads the stories which have the most human angle . . . the stories which lay bare without restraint the innermost feelings. The public is given what it demands, no more and no less. And the public too often turns on the men who " feed " it, and holding up hands to high heaven, cries that it is scandalous that a newspaper should be allowed to print " such things."

A newspaper is not run as a philanthropic concern. It is run by its proprietor in order to make profits for himself and his shareholders and in order to keep hundreds of men and women in employment. Readers demand the news of the whole world. So men are sent over the whole world to get the news. Unless one paper unearths the news another paper will. The paper which is up to the minute with its news will steal the reader from the more indolent and lethargic paper. One reader lost may mean a whole family of readers lost. A lack of interest growing and damaging . . . and from mouth to mouth may go the word that *The Daily Record* is much more entertaining and enterprising than *The Daily Bugle.* And advertising managers shoot themselves in heaps, cleverly missing the brain.

Editors are heaped with unthinking abuse if stories of questionable taste are put in their papers. It is not the fault of the editors. It is the fault, if fault it be, of the reader . . . of the buyer of the paper. The editor often says . . . and I have often heard him say, " I don't like that story much. But I suppose it must go in. Some of our readers expect it." In it goes and pleases and offends the readers, in proportion.

The readers who are delighted to have such tasty news commend the editor as a live wire and the right man for his post. The reader whose taste is offended lets it be understood at his club that in his opinion the editor of the paper is a hypocrite, a nincompoop and possessed of criminal tendencies.

Large numbers of men and women on the fringe of society scream when their names are mentioned by gossip writers. They go around to their friends yelling that it is a scandal that their private concerns should be hung out to dry and that they will write to their solicitors at once.

But consider what happens if the names of these people are not mentioned in the gossip columns. They are forthwith mightily affronted. They use every conceivable subterfuge to have their names put in the papers. They bombard with letters the very gossip writer they have just reviled . . . telling him of social and charitable functions they are organising—the charities which begin—and end—at home—what clothes they are wearing, what restaurants they are patronising . . . con-

juring up, inventing all and every excuse for "just a mention."

I can remember Viscount Castlerosse, who at his best is a commentator on men and women and life in general without a peer in the country, writing a blistering article about these pestiferous humbugs. He said that he was sick and tired of being criticised for writing about personalities. The people he wrote about complained. The people he did not write about complained. And so he dipped his pen in vitriol and one fine Sunday morning consigned the whole boiling lot to hell. From which delectable resort they emerged bedraggled with their "tales" between their legs.

The reporter becomes hardened. He must inevitably do so. He sees so much of the misery, unfairness and poverty of contemporary life. He sees so much to tear his heart that were he to allow his feelings to interfere with his duties as a newspaper man, he would soon lose his reason. The reporter gets the real angle on life, and on human character as few people can get it. And he is just as sickened and disgusted by the fawnings of the Nobodies as he is by the selfishness, meanness and cruelties of some of the high and mighty. He must not reflect his private opinions in his stories. He must set down facts . . . as facts. The reader must judge for himself.

The strain on a sensitive being . . . and reporters begin their careers as sensitive beings, of writing words in cold blood when his whole soul yearns for him to write in blood-red ink what he

really and truly knows, is heavy indeed. His newspaper is hungry for news and must be fed even at the expense of human sorrows and human viciousness. The tentacles stretch out to the uttermost parts of the earth. The mills of the newspaper gods grind slowly.

An editor of a great newspaper is rather like the Almighty . . . from whom no secrets are hid.

In his hand he balances reputations and that same hand can hurl a thunderbolt . . . with a sure aim. On his judgment depends the careers and peace of mind of an army. It is commonly supposed that newspaper editors are men of granite with jutting chins—men who puff cigar smoke in the faces of their victims and chuckle hoarsely while so engaged. The more scandalous the story which is unearthed the more delighted the editor . . . the grave-digger of decency. These suppositions are false. And they are unjust : and ignorant.

A man brought a story to an editor of my acquaintance. From the point of view of a story it was a pippin and exclusive. Newspapers do a great deal to unearth an exclusive " splash " story. Were this story to which I refer to have been printed it would as surely have brought down in ruins the fair name of a noble house carrying in its wake disgrace and ignominy to people whose own lives had been remarkable for uprightness and public service. The editor had to choose . . . and choose quickly . . . which it was to be . . . a tremendous mud-splattered story . . . or silence.

So he offered the caller several hundred pounds

for his story, and made him sign a statement binding him not to offer it to any other newspaper for publication. The caller signed and went away well pleased with his cheque. The moment his back was turned the editor took up the manuscript and tore it in half.

The public often makes a great to do about the stories it reads in its morning newspaper. . . . "Why do they print such muck?" is the angry demand. But the public never pauses to consider the stories which have not been printed that morning. The best, the most shattering stories which pour into a newspaper are often "spiked" and are heard of no more . . . for reasons of public morals, of political expedience and very much more frequently than is supposed, for reasons of taste and good manners.

The Press of Great Britain is "free." And at a time of any national emergency the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are content to rely on the patriotism and sense of fitness of the editors of the country's newspapers. They never so rely in vain.

The abdication of King Edward VIII can be cited for all time as perhaps the supreme example of the high sense of public responsibility of the British Press. No one paper tried to steal a march on the other. They all walked in harness and when they did come out with the story, they all came out with it on the same day.

So it was and so it will always be in the Press in any time of national crisis or tension.

No one was nationally excited the day I joined

the reporter's staff on the *Daily Express* . . . except myself. For at last I should be able to write something, to express myself . . . and at last I would be able to have civilised hours of work. The reporter's hours on day duty are scheduled to start at eleven o'clock in the morning and to finish at seven o'clock at night.

Any newspaper man reading these words will immediately laugh himself sick.

The potentate who in future was to direct my coming goings-out was the News Editor. Had I realised what I was in for I would have run a thousand miles. . . . The News Editor of the *Daily Express* was, and indeed still is at this moment, Mr. J. B. Wilson. In appearance he resembles a bishop, with his fresh-complexioned face, free of any ageing line, and his snow-white hair. In action he resembles the devil himself. J. B. is a famous character and a great News Editor. He can smell a story from here to Greenland's icy mountains, and for a "good story" he would gladly sell his grandmother.

His life is his work and his work for many years has been to see that the paper he serves gets the news it should get. J. B. arrives at the office before any of his staff and leaves at about midnight. Even then he can barely tear himself away. He has little private life. It is a tribute to the organising powers of this remarkable being that he has found time to marry a charming wife and raise a strapping family, though no one has been clear how it has come about.

J. B. will drive reporters to the limit of their endurance and then some. He does not look on reporters as human beings, but just as highly skilled slaves who are there to be used. They may sleep, eat, fall in love, marry and have babies like other men, but were you to tell J. B. so, he would smile a disbelieving smile. Any man who has passed through the hands of J. B. and survived the ordeal is fit for greater things indeed. He tests a man's temper, his health, his appetite, his morals, his efficiency and his peace of mind. He kills to cure.

In J. B.'s room sits and has sat for years Miss Dorothy Secker, who is his secretary, eyes and ears and sister and mother to all the reporters. She has seen so many changes that now she is incapable of being shocked. Nothing surprises her. Nothing upsets her. She knows everything. She is uncompromisingly direct, businesslike, and makes no bones if she dislikes a reporter. A real character and a woman with a heart of gold. The day Miss Secker leaves the *Daily Express* that building of many windows will rock to its foundations.

It seemed to me the morning I joined the reportorial staff that my chief was determined to see how soon he could break my heart. I was sent out to interview a woman living in a dingy house in Clapham. I inveigled some sort of tale out of her, returned to the office and handed in my story. It was received with a grunt. During the rest of the day I was sent out on no fewer than five other assignments—wild goose chases all over London.

I arrived at one of my destinations to find a message waiting for me from the news room to say that a mistake had been made in the address and that I was to report back to the office. I spent all that day on my feet, or in tubes, trains and buses . . . doing the odd dirty jobs that are given to young reporters . . . though I was a reporter young only in experience. But it did not matter to J. B. that I had once travelled the world or indeed that I had spent a year and a half on the sub's desk. To him I was " new." And therefore I had to be broken in. Or broken up.

In all that day I wrote and handed in six stories . . . and seven o'clock came. I was dead to the world. The unaccustomed work, the strain of trying to extract information from unwilling mouths, and the rudeness which had greeted me at houses where I had gone to ask for a photograph of the " dead woman " all did me in absolutely. Sharp as the clock struck seven and I was reaching for my hat, Miss Secker called to me. I stood before the great J. B., snowed under an avalanche of papers. His desk always resembled an earthquake in San Francisco. I waited. He mumbled something at me. He has an indistinct, jerky way of talking coupled with his habit of cigarette chain smoking. I found at first the greatest difficulty in understanding him.

An invitation card was put in my hand. For an official dinner that night. " Might be something in it " mumbled J. B. So away I had to go to my flat, change into evening clothes and attend the

first of a score of these appalling functions, where everyone eats too much and the speeches are as indigestible as the food. And a free "puff" is expected for free drinks.

I returned to the office at midnight and wrote a few lines. Then I left. And I tumbled into bed at one o'clock in the morning. Thus my first day as a reporter.

Next morning I leaped out of bed and snatched the paper from under the door. How thrilling to see my work in print at last . . . probably seven times, for had I not written seven stories? I tore open the paper and scoured it from page to page . . . till it fell out of my hand on to the floor.

Not one word . . . not one single damned syllable of mine was printed.

All my work of yesterday . . . all my goings and comings . . . all my anxieties to write each story as best it appeared to me . . . all gone for nothing . . . put on that accursed spike. Or were my stories no good? Was it that after all I did not know how to get a story from anyone or anywhere, and worst of all did not know how to write it succinctly and well so that it would be acceptable? Was all my training as a "sub" in the art of putting the gist of my story in the opening sentence, condensing and forbearing to include any matter not strictly germane to the issue—was all this for nothing?

I trust that never again shall I find myself in the throes of the mental conflict of that hour. Always too ready perhaps to wilt under discouragement

and to condemn too harshly an imaginary fault in myself, I was in despair. I could hardly wait till I reached the office to get at the truth of the matter.

Why send me out on these stories if there was to be no room for them? What was the sense in that? I failed to see, as I have ever failed to see, any valid reason why a worker should receive no encouragement from his masters. I should have been told . . . I should have been told. Hell take everything.

It was a beautiful summer's day when I climbed to the top of a number eleven omnibus, but for all I cared or knew the day might have been cold and bitter. So bitter were my feelings that I regarded with loathing the conductor, who with the optimism and bonhomie so characteristic of his calling, cheerily shrilled " Fares please, sir."

The Assistant News Editor, a youngish man with a long nose and a lovable disposition known as " Mac " Macbride, observed my sad expression. He was invariably observant. I told him what had happened or rather what had not happened to my stories of the previous day. And he smiled and told me that the non-appearance of my work in the glory of print did not reflect on my efficiency. In short that I would have to expect more of the same kind of disappointment. My stories were relatively unimportant. But necessary in case " there was something important in them." I was to owe a deal to Mac at one time and another. He is to me the finest type of newspaperman, who believes in

encouraging the men under him, treating them as human beings, to be patted on the back now and again and soothed. He is a fine fellow. He went later to the *Daily Herald* and may he long prosper.

In the months that came I managed to survive days of anxious and wearisome investigations which came to nothing, and to put up with having no spare time. I realised that I belonged to my paper, body and soul. I did not care overmuch what they did with my body, but I was damned if they were going to do anything with my soul. With that proviso ever in my mind, I managed to get along well enough. As my friend Cecil Hunt, late fiction editor of the *Daily Mail* writes in his book, " You Want To Be a Journalist ? " : " Only the true journalist enthusiasm can survive such heart-breaking conditions of thwarted endeavour." My friend Mr. Hunt has spoken a tank full.

I do not claim it was because I was a " true journalist " that I stood up to thwarted endeavour. Rather was it because I dislike being beaten and I had always at the back of my head a determination to get myself out of the rut. Determination is so much. A sure and trusty shield to carry in the battle.

One day General Booth died. His funeral was to be solemnised with flags and processions. Here was a story with which to catch the imagination of the reader, and it called for a writer with considerable descriptive powers . . . H. V. Morton would have been sent to cover it only he was away. The next man, Gordon Beckles, was ill, and Leslie Randall, a very efficient reporter, was away on

another job. The scourge of influenza had depleted the office. J. B. Wilson was worried and peevish. He disliked his reporters being ill. Who was to be sent on the story?

J. B., with a sigh of a man against whom Fate has dealt a bitter blow, decided to send me. He told me he wanted "a first-class story," and he left me to it. Girding up my loins I followed the funeral procession all the way to Abney Park Cemetery in North London. The crowd was so dense in the city that women fainted like ninepins. Every window along the route was filled with onlookers. An extraordinary emotion was in the air as the thousands of Salvationists marched singing, with their dead leader in their midst, their bands playing the stirring music of their familiar hymns. It struck me that here was no occasion for sorrow but for rejoicing. The white armlets worn by the mourners stood out startlingly against their red and black uniforms. The countless banners they bore aloft swayed and dipped in the breeze.

I managed to get a stance near the grave, near Mrs. Bramwell Booth. From time to time she would square her shoulders, lifting her head high . . . as she stared at the words emblazoned on her husband's coffin, "In Action Faithful. In Honour Clear."

I raced back to the office, hardly able to wait till I could pin some of this emotion to paper. I put down the scene exactly as I had seen it. It was received by J. B. with the usual grunt. Well, I had done my best. I could do no more.

Next day the splash page of the *Daily Express* carried my story spread across three columns. Every word was there—just as I had written it. No heartless sub had seen fit to strike out a word of it or to embellish a line of it. I nearly wept with pleasure. Gone in a flash and forgotten were all my set-backs and disappointments. So strange is the resilience of comparative youth. So intoxicating the joy of creation.

From that time forth I had stories in the paper almost daily. I was sent out on important assignments. My peculiar style was studied and stories were chosen for me. I received an increase in pay and one day after I had written a story describing my feelings while sitting in the condemned cell at the Old Bailey, Mr. Baxter, who was then editor, sent for me.

" That was the best story in the paper to-day," he told me. " Would you like to go on the feature staff under Reginald Pound ? " Pound is a writer who has yet to be fully recognised.

And then I made what I count as a big mistake. For some reason I accepted a job which while giving me invaluable experience in " make up " of pages and the trickiness of type, cut me off for the next two and a half years from actual writing. But Baxter obviously wanted me to take this post, and I did so. He had a way with him.

J. B. I think was honestly sorry to see me leave his immediate staff and control. I had grown to see and appreciate that beneath this hard boiled exterior, this relentless slave driver wore a heart of

great kindliness. I think that the day I ceased to be afraid of J. B. was the day when he and I became on a really friendly footing. He had driven me hard because it was his way. And because he wanted to see the stuff of which I was made. He is still going strong and I wager that his desk is still invisible under the papers lying helter skelter upon it, and Dorothy Secker, wise and clear-visioned as ever, is still there sitting opposite to him. I love and respect them both.

In time I became Feature Editor, which meant that I had sometimes to be responsible for filling as many as four or five pages with contributions. These contributions and articles I had to choose and buy and put neatly in their pages. I had to keep constant watch on forthcoming events and arrange for them to be "covered." The feature writers, such as Swaffer, James Agate—he of the brilliant, witty style—poor Harold Pemberton, one of the grandest newspapermen who ever lived, who was killed years later in an aeroplane crash, Ewart Hodson, of the acid wit, who succeeded the clever and shrewd G. A. Atkinson, as film critic, and H. V. Morton, all brought their copy to me. My job was highly responsible, and I had only one assistant, a Miss Hilda Coe. Sometime I may be able to repay this gifted woman for all the help she gave me and the personal friendship she offered me so freely and generously. She saw me through many days of doubt and despair, and her unfailing cheerfulness and unselfishness were an inspiration. She is also a considerable writer herself, a fact

of which the *Daily Express* is now beginning to be aware. She has had a long wait.

I came to this job after having written about most things under the sun. I had done a series on Old Bailey trials. I had been sub-editor, reporter, assistant dramatic critic, golf correspondent, lawn tennis correspondent, children's page and leader page writer and a caption-picture writer. A famous golf champion had written a series of articles receiving some thirty guineas per article, every word of which I wrote myself.

I was very ill twice during this period. In addition to my feature editorship work, I was beginning a radio daily article, a shadow of the articles I write now, and every Saturday I wrote half a page of original material for the children, called "Uncle Columbus." My hours were unending. And I felt that here I was not really making my mark. Just a useful man . . . extremely versatile, a fatal virtue in Fleet Street, and there I would remain at a moderate salary. No one would move me. I was cheap, and reliable, and clean about the office.

I watched Baxter do wonderful feats with the *Express*. He had a flair and personality, and he would often write a great part of the paper himself. He was, and still is, a writer with a tremendous facility for painting a picture with a phrase. He was urbane and unshakable. He was so kind-hearted that he would promise me promotion and a bigger chance just to keep me happy. And then forget all about me. I know he did not mean deliberately to

discourage me. Indeed he was kindness itself to me, and I gave him every bit of loyalty I could give. He probably never noticed it.

I never remained long enough to see him give me my great chance. But he was forced into so many positions when he had to promise people plums in order not to hurt their feelings, that I was but one of the many. He had a terrific task, and he did it well.

This man who is now a power under my lord Kelmsley and writes brilliantly under the pen-name of " Atticus " in the *Sunday Times*, directing the course of the *Daily Sketch* with one hand and using the other to smooth his path through the House of Commons of which he is so urbane a member, has had a strange career. He came to England from Canada selling pianos. Lord Beaverbrook was " taken " by him and gave him his head, first on the *Sunday Express* and then on the " Daily." Alternately, I felt I could murder Baxter and embrace him. An extraordinary person. And heaven knows where he will end. One thing is certain—whatever happens Baxter will be very much all right. He also is blessed, besides his undeniable qualities, with a beautiful wife and a lovely little son, both of whom he rightly adores.

Another personality at the *Express* is the General Manager, like Baxter, a Canadian, but unlike Baxter, of a retiring nature. While Baxter became editor after selling pianos and writing short stories, Robertson met Lord Beaverbrook, then Sir Max Aitken, at the Queen's Hotel in Montreal. There

being no boy available to carry the Beaverbrookian suitcase upstairs, Robertson, who was working his way through Toronto University by acting as spare-time clerk at the hotel, volunteered for the job. Since then he has gone from strength to strength, and is now Lord Beaverbrook's right-hand man.

E. J. Robertson is cool-headed, clear-brained, utterly unpanicky and a wizard of sagacity. He is one of the few men who have been able to handle Lord Beaverbrook without kid gloves. His quiet progress through the office and his unspectacular way of getting everything done with the minimum of fuss, won him general respect. He is not a talker, but is always courteous and ready to listen. He treated me invariably with consideration and were I in a tight corner I know no man I would rather have by me than Robertson. He still reigns in that palace of glass in Fleet Street and not even an increasing circulation can send his own circulation up. His pulse is steady through triumph and disaster. He must surely be one of Beaverbrook's best gambles. Was ever a man who had a truer or saner sense of values ? I like him tremendously. And I admire him more than a little.

Only once have I met Lord Beaverbrook. I met his son Max Aitken several times, a very good-looking young man who will inherit his father's millions and his father's responsibilities. What burning words the pen of Max will write across Fleet Street remains to be seen. But he has charm and he has brains. One day when I was reporter and entirely unknown to him, young Max entered

the news room. He came up to me and asked me out to lunch.

In a short time he had extracted from me the story of my life and what I thought and why I thought it. Analysing, accepting and rejecting. For that invitation to lunch I shall ever be grateful. Not because I was hungry for material sustenance, but because I happened at that moment to be hungry for some measure of recognition, however slight.

I arrived at the office one day to find a message from Lord Beaverbrook's secretary to the effect that his master would be glad if I would dine with him that night at Stornaway House. I accepted, of course, and at the appointed hour made my way to the mansion which houses this astonishing citizen. Why I had been asked to dinner I did not know. Suffice it that Lord Beaverbrook never did anything without a reason and that I was as nervous as a lioness with whelps.

I was received by a major-domo without any undue surprise. And waved towards a long staircase. This I climbed and a resplendent being yelled out my name and I entered a large room. I had never seen Lord Beaverbrook, but I recognised him at once from his Strube caricatures . . . that topical genius and prince of good fellows, Strube. My host was talking to a beautiful damsel and did not turn his head as I came in. Why should he? I was not a damsel, and not particularly beautiful, though I was fresh from a very hot bath and clad in shining white shirt, collar and tie and immacu-

lately pressed trousers . . . pressed under my bed for two days and two nights.

We went " in " to dinner. I sat next to Lord Beaverbrook and to Lady Louis Mountbatten, whom I thought singularly gracious. Opposite to me sat Lord Castlerosse and the Aga Khan . . . there were others in the dim light of the candle-lit table, but I did not know who they were. No one told me.

Suddenly my host turned towards me and barked a question at me about Lord Lloyd and Egypt. Now here I was on safe ground. But as so often happened to me at momentous moments, my stammer went back on me. I gathered myself together to speak, for I knew that once I could get talking to my host, he would continue talking to me. I just knew it. But Lord Beaverbrook, with the impatience of all such men . . . Lord Lloyd is just the same . . . was accustomed to receiving immediate answers to his questions. He did not know, of course, that I stammered when nervous, and I was excusably nervous.

He turned away and began chatting to Castlerosse and my moment was lost.

I crimsoned with embarrassment and could gladly have hidden myself under the table. Once or twice Lord Beaverbrook put a question to me and I was able to reply. But I never had his real attention and he was only being polite. I fear he did not think much of his Collie Knox.

I glanced from time to time at this amazing man. Short in stature, with an immense head, he struck

me as being frighteningly vital. I listened to his conversation at that table, and heard his volleys of questions and his considered opinions. He has the eyes of a fanatic. He is fanatical for the rights he holds dear and for the causes he is determined to further and ram home to victory. Oh, if only I could have had a chance of a word with him—just one. There was so much I could have said. Seldom has anyone so caught my imagination. But it was not to be.

After dinner we strolled upstairs but not before I had pinned the Aga Khan in a corner and talked to him about India. I was determined somehow to restore my shattered morale. Upstairs a private orchestra played to us from a near-by room and I prayed for the hour to strike when I could conveniently go home. It came. I went forward and held out my hand to Lord Beaverbrook, sick at heart. Then a heart-warming thing happened.

With a smile which transfigured his face, he took my arm and walked with me to the top of the staircase. He shook my hand and in a soft and exceedingly kindly voice said, " Good night, Knox. So glad you could come. Please come again sometime."

I have never seen him since.

In my sixth year at the *Daily Express* I applied for more pay. But though I was doing two men's work I did not get what I considered adequate remuneration. The present feature editor of the *Express* receives twice my salary of that time and has several assistants. In addition there was my daily

feature. I also was supposed to get radio news stories. I got them, but the strain was killing me. I had a breakdown again. I returned to the fray. I saw no real future for me, and I then reached the conclusion, reached by so many people before me in Fleet Street, that in that thoroughfare of thrills and heartbreaks a prophet is without honour on his own and original dunghill.

There are two ways of succeeding in Fleet Street. One is to leave one's original paper for a rival. The other is to return from a short spell with the rival back to the original love. At once your chiefs will see in you great possibilities and you will be given every chance to become a " name."

The fact that your talents do not necessarily increase with your salary is not considered. You must go away to be appreciated . . . across the road or down the drain. I suppose it is natural when all its facets are taken into account, but it had driven many a man crazy with uncertainty and self-recriminations. This as well as imbuing him with the certainty of knowledge that he is not meant to reach the top rung of any ladder and that his best and wisest course is to remain unknown and in the background, earning a fair salary and just being a useful hack.

The air of the office was heavy with rumours . . . changes and uncertainties. Suddenly a young man named Christianssen was put in as assistant editor at an incredibly early age. He had done splendid work on the *Sunday Express* and was obviously a born journalist, and high in favour.

A whisper round a Fleet Street office and its echo is deafening. We all knew that Baxter was leaving soon . . . to a new job at an incredible salary. He soon resigned and left to take up the post as Director of Public Relations with Gaumont British. He had achieved what he had set out to achieve . . . an immense net sale. To quote his own words in his book, " Strange Street," " Instead of feeling elated I felt jaded. For one thing the paper had become a huge organisation . . . where once I faced my staff and gave them personal leadership as I could summon, now there were editors in the two provincial offices with staffs of their own and only private telegraph lines to keep us in touch . . . I felt the urge for further adventure, for the thrill of building or re-building something else."

Baxter left with these words : " I have seen all this in company with the goodly fellows of the Press, poets who never wrote a poem, sentimentalists who never shed a tear, cynics who never refused a companion in distress, historians who recorded nothing older than a day. I have seen it all and been part of it all. It is the journalist's boast."

There was no time to remember Collie Knox . . . and any promise to make him a second H. V. Morton. Just before he left Baxter wrote me a charming note in which he hinted that there were to be changes, that the changes might not be congenial to me and that perhaps I had better look about elsewhere.

It was a bitter moment to me. I had served my masters faithfully and well. I did not understand.

I still do not understand. But I supposed it meant that Christianssen was to become editor—as he did and still remains—and that he had his own ideas about his staff. I do not know. I shall never know. And yet Christianssen was fair and entirely charming to me. This young-old man with the keen eyes twinkling away behind thick glasses, imperturbable, born with a genius for his craft, for whom I have the highest regard. He caught fortune on the hop and taught it to stand at attention.

He directs an enormous machine and has lost none of his unspoiled nature, and the men who serve him have a true liking for their young chief. He weathers a storm with a laugh and has the inestimable gift of seeing things as they are. It was a pity perhaps for my view that at that period he did not see any striking potentiality in me. But I was one of the old gang and when a new broom sweeps, it sometimes sweeps where it has not really meant to sweep. My story is one of a score and I do not grumble.

And yet I do not think it was Christianssen's wish that I should leave. I do not credit that it was Robertson's. Was it Lord Beaverbrook's? But I have, thank God, had a soldier's training and I do not unduly question the will of my superior officer. Obviously I was not considered an irreplaceable asset to the well-being of the *Daily Express* . . . there were wheels within wheels. I had had my hint and I must take it as gracefully as possible.

So after six years' service on the *Daily Express*,

where I had done a multiplicity of jobs and taken considerable responsibility . . . with a drawer full of appreciative chits from my editor, I sat down and wrote out my resignation to Baxter. He had not yet left.

I did not go round saying good-bye to my colleagues. My heart was too heavy. But I did see Christianssen and wished him success with all sincerity . . . for his high estate has been won by sheer merit and by nothing else. But the others I could not face.

And yet I found it in me to say farewell to the compositors and linotype men and to that splendid fellow, Chief Printer Percy Pratt, fat, large-hearted and my very good friend. As Feature Editor I had come daily into contact with the "comps." as they are called. Most of them were ex-service men of the finest type. I held them in high esteem. In a thousand ways they had helped me when they could so easily have hindered. Never once did they let me down. Never was it too much trouble to re-set a heading for me or re-make-up a page. They are the salt of their profession . . . and in every newspaper office you will find them. They will play merry hell with the upstart and the bully and get the better of him every time. They are unerring judges of character.

And so I left the Palace of Glass . . . and I went forth out of those swing doors with no employment in view. A chapter again ended. And now I must wander till I should find another signpost and again chose the path to the right—or the left . . .

or maybe straight ahead to where the road would assuredly bend.

Four weeks later I sat in the office of Mr. A. L. Cranfield, then Assistant Editor and now Editor of the *Daily Mail*.* I had written out of the blue to Mr. J. S. Lawrence, the News Editor, offering my services and he had passed my letter on to Cranfield.

I sat perched on the edge of an enormous arm-chair. My name was known through my radio articles in the *Express*, and even then the B.B.C. was beginning to dislike the way in which I went for it and managed to rout out its most cherished secrets. I wrote in a very personal style, and in those days, only five years ago this September . . . the personal style in journalism was not looked on with favour, certainly not by the *Daily Mail*. So I saw little hope.

But I sat that day in the presence of a man to whom I owe more than I can ever hope to repay. I have tried to repay him by giving him my unstinting loyalty and that he will always have in abundance. And I have long since given him my affection. Which will abide long after I leave Fleet Street and lead the quiet life I long to lead.

Cranfield that day in his office heard my story and I told him what I wanted to do. I wanted to start in the *Daily Mail* a daily page on broadcasting . . . to write it in my own style, to be given my head and to be left to make or mar. If I failed, well, out I would go. If I succeeded, well, I should stay. I told him candidly, for I am a believer in

* Mr. Cranfield resigned his position as Editor of the *Daily Mail* in October, 1938.

the truth, that I had already left the *Express*, so there was no question of my offering my services on a blackmail angle. I had had no other offer. I was frank about it. No paper was competing for me—then—and the *Express* did not want me. But here I was. I had made some small reputation besides that of a columnist, as a getter of exclusive new stories on radio matters . . . and I think that was what induced the good Jimmy Lawrence, a very able and strong News Editor, to ask Cranfield to accord me the interview.

Cranfield told me to go away and come back in three days. I returned. My interlocutor sat forward on his chair, his vast shoulders seeming to fill the room, and asked me what salary I wanted. Taking a deep breath I told him. He went into the next room. And I paced up and down. In five minutes he returned and said, "All right. Go off on a holiday. You need it. Then come and join us."

I went in to see Mr. W. L. Warden, the then Editor, and shook hands with him. He was most friendly. I left Northcliffe House walking on air. I had had a terrible four weeks and now it was over. I was a member of the staff of the great *Daily Mail*. And I cocked a snook at the *Daily Express* offices as I passed. Heaven forgive me.

It was an extraordinary experience working in the *Daily Mail* office after the *Express*. Here no one worked in shirt sleeves and no one dashed about or shouted. All was quiet. The atmosphere was more like that of a cathedral than of a newspaper office. When I went in to see Lawrence I observed

that there was not one paper on his desk. It was bare as a board. Everything smacked of superlative organising. No fuss, no noise . . . no undue excitement. It may have been my imagination, but I felt that it was as if the spirit of Lord Northcliffe still walked the corridors and filled the building. Here was a tradition, the tradition of a great newspaper started by a genius and led to the front by pioneers. On its staff had served men whose names are honoured in Fleet Street, and the giants of those old days were there all on the *Mail.*

To this day I am conscious of that atmosphere of tradition—as if the founder of this newspaper and surely the greatest journalist who has ever lived, still broods over all. It is as if he is still in command, seeing that all is well and taking careful note of the men who serve his creation.

I began my daily articles. I knew that Cranfield had had a tussle to get me taken on, but he believed I had something in me to give, and I was determined if it killed me to justify not only myself but him. It nearly did kill me.

I put all I knew into my feature writing and I managed also to get new scoop after scoop. My name was blazed across the omnibuses, and hordes of these gaudy chariots went down Fleet Street, past the *Daily Express* office, causing considerable wonder to the occupants of my late home.

By degrees readers began to write to me. Then their letters increased in numbers. I grew more and more personal in my writings. And we amazed the old hands at Northcliffe House by my daring.

I spent every moment making and cementing "contacts" at the B.B.C. and puzzling out secrets from the B.B.C. I attacked them on every justifiable occasion. I praised them now and then, when they were good, and slashed them when they were bad, as they often were. The public liked my methods. They recognised that I was sincere and that I wrote just as I felt. My daily page gradually grew to be my own personal page. And from the letters it brought me I learned a great truth, one that has proved invaluable to me. One which I recommend to all budding young journalists.

The truth is that if you write to your readers as man to man—without fear or favour—they will like you and respect you. More, their hearts will warm to you. Never write down, but be frank and honest and never be afraid of honest sentiment.

The least trace of insincerity and you are lost, for insincerity shines through the printed word, and no writer has been able to get away with it for long. A few manage to earn a spurious popularity for a little while . . . but then their sloppiness, false sentimentality and mental cowardice does them down. The public grows wise to them. The public is naturally wise. It is not easily hoodwinked. It is also appreciative and uncannily discerning.

My daily page began to take it out of me. The heads of the B.B.C. were trying hard to get me out of their way. I was much too much of a thorn in their pink flesh. They were not accustomed to any writer daring to speak his mind. If one of them

tried that tack a word from Sir John Reith to a man in command, and the writer was told to lay off.

But the B.B.C. had reckoned without the *Daily Mail*. Cranfield had said he would give me my head and nobly he kept his promise. I was backed up to the last comma. I was trusted, and I never betrayed that trust. . . . Artists knew I was unbribable, and the B.B.C. knew that I had no fear of them and that I was not impressed by the little tin-pot gods who dwell on the mountain of Broadcasting House.

It was wonderful to me to feel that I had the entire backing of my chiefs : indeed of the whole mighty organisation. It gave me courage and it inspired me to do my damnedest. In the five years I have been on the staff of the *Daily Mail* I have never been given one direct order. No one has ever said to me " Write about so and so," or " Don't write about that." No one has ever once interfered. Instead, my editor has encouraged me, drawn out of me all the best that is in me, and has stood like a rock behind me.

For such a man I will do much. It would be unthinkable to me to let such a man down. And it would be difficult to tempt me away from his side so long as he still had need of me. I take no credit for this decision. Maybe he has been in part himself repaid by my success, if I may call it such. Well and very good. But if he had not taken a chance and engaged me and then gone all out on what was after all at that time not a very obviously

good bet, I would still be waging a dispirited battle against lethargy and cold shoulders.

One week I got a splash exclusive story every day. The B.B.C. was jumping about on hot bricks. Reith was heard to say that I " ought to be in jail " and representations were made to me to " lay off " . . . by the B.B.C. I refused. I was told that Lord Rothermere might be approached as my " stories were inaccurate." I replied: " If my stories are inaccurate in any one sentence, Lord Rothermere will doubtless discharge me. And rightly. Complain to him by all means." Nothing, of course, was done.

I was in the grip of great excitement at that hour . . . for I was fighting the B.B.C. and its dictatorship and its many questionable ways single-handed. My daily feature became onerous to me, and my mail was growing so rapidly that I could not cope with it even with the invaluable help and co-operation of my secretary, Miss Ruby Nunn, who still shields and bears with me. I never seemed to be able to sleep at night.

Through my contacts inside and outside the B.B.C. . . . contacts which I had built up over years . . . I was able to make big B.B.C. policy stories known to the *Daily Mail* public before they had been made known to the B.B.C. officials themselves. At night I used to go to bed fearing that the next morning a rival newspaper might beat me on a big story. I was losing my sense of proportion in my mad keenness not to let my paper down.

The strain of being the B.B.C.'s severest . . .

and I hope I may say . . . fairest critic in my daily articles was increased by the knowledge that day by day Sir John Reith and his circle of " Yes Men " were closing the gates of information against me. I had to call at Broadcasting House every day in the ordinary way of my work. I knew that various officials were being " roasted " and suspected of giving me inside information . . . idiotically, because none of my inside information came from any official I visited at Broadcasting House. Naturally.

If I concentrated on my daily article and burned my boats and really let myself go about the B.B.C. and the abuses I knew were rampant, how could I hope to get even the smallest news story from men of an organisation whose work and methods I constantly found it my duty to attack? The news room people of my paper did not care overmuch about my feature . . . what they wanted were exclusive new stories. Most understandable. For myself I knew that unless I could be free to develop my feature as I wished . . . without bothering my head and my nerves over inside B.B.C. information, my feature would not develop into the force to which I knew it could develop.

I did not know what to do. From the point of view of appeal and of the reader interest I was aware that my feature was the main thing . . . or could easily be made the main thing. I had never taken to hunting with hounds while running with hares. It was repugnant to me to damn the eyes of B.B.C. officials or radio artists and then the next

day expect to get information out of them. Either it had to be news or my feature. I saw that, and determined to have the whole thing out. When Fate, as is its pretty little way, stepped into the ring and knocked me out on its own.

Then began the worst illness I had ever undergone in a life of much illness. For six months I was away from my work, and for six weeks it was touch and go with me. My nerves cracked for a start. After much research on the part of my doctor and specialists, it was found that I had inside me millions of amœbic dysentery germs. That I had them ever since I came home from the East and had never known it. The specialist told me before sending in his whacking bill, which I gladly paid . . . that I was a marvel to have worked as I had done all these years with germs in me which had multiplied like eager rabbits. As a bonne-bouche I was informed that there was also the little matter of an abscess near my appendix . . . that six months might see me right and that maybe I might never be able to return to Fleet Street again.

Newspapers may at times be hard and unrelenting . . . and the men in charge forced to take decisions which may result in hardship and that awful searching for " another job " on the part of employees. But when pain and anguish wring the brow and their men fall down because at last it has become physically and mentally impossible for them to stand up, they are wonderful.

The whole of the six months I was away I was kept on full pay. From time to time my Editor and

Mr. Stanley Bell, our Managing Director, a youngish man who has become one of the powers in Fleet Street by virtue of a shrewd brain and organising ability—and incidentally blessed with a speaking voice which could charm a serpent—came down to visit me with Sir George Sutton. They cheered me up and assured me that my place would be left open for me. During those months I went through tortures of indecision and mental anxiety. The public's memory is not overlong . . . there are many writers coming along. I should lose touch with radio . . . I was finished. Thus went my imaginings.

Then Cranfield had an idea that if I was strong enough I could write some messages to my readers . . . just chatty, friendly letters, saying how I was getting on. I did so and the response was heart-warming more than I can express. Readers wrote to me from all over the world. . . . They sent me chicken jelly, books, tracts, long personal letters, and masses of flowers. Sometimes I would write these little articles when I could not move in bed . . . but at all costs I must keep in touch.

During this illness I learned a vast deal. It is good for every man and woman to be very ill at some time in life. As you lie in bed helpless, knowing that you are removed from the outside world . . . feeling rather like a disembodied spirit . . . you begin to turn things over in your mind. For you have time. I had not had time to think clearly and constructively for some years. There came to me the strong conviction that I had reached

a stage when I must readjust my ideas. I must acknowledge that I would never be entirely fit any more and suit my work and my nerves to that fact. Life is short and at intermittent moments sweet, and it is not sensible to kill oneself for nothing . . . out of a misguided sense of duty. The more I worried and overstrained myself in the future, the less worth would I become to my employers in the end. I had flared up very quickly in the neon-lights of my profession and I did not mean to die out as quickly.

I won through to a new philosophy of life . . . a philosophy which I have tried to hand on to all those in need of a helping, reassuring word. As who amongst us is not? It is of little avail striving for money and for fame if neither of these debatable luxuries can be enjoyed. Health counts more than most things . . . health and the peace of mind which comes with the surety that one is doing one's best and that one cannot . . . one will not, try to do more. The little worries which had tormented me for so long smoothed themselves out and vanished in a puff. My readers were sending me wonderful letters . . . in such abundance that my employers were astounded. It had not struck them that so much good will could be engendered by the written word. It had certainly not struck me.

The day I returned to work the *Daily Mail* carried a story on the splash page which said " The suspension of the ' Collie Knox Calling ' feature last autumn when Mr. Knox accepted medical advice to undergo prolonged treatment, led to a

remarkable demonstration of concern and affection on the part of his many thousands of readers."

From this time onwards I wrote three radio articles a week instead of one every day. It was either that or my leaving Fleet Street. But the whole time there ran through my mind the thought that the unbounding personal friendliness I had won, and never have I felt more humble or more proud, from readers during my illness . . . had not been adequately followed up. There was something waiting for me to do, something no one had done before. What was it?

Thus the Friday Week-End Broadcast was born. To its encouragement and indeed in large measure to its inception, I owe again a debt to my Editor. For from the first it seemed to have hit the mark. My paper played up grandly. In these articles I wrote, and I still do write, of the ordinary things of everyday life . . . of the ordinary emotions of everyday men and women. Having a horror of slush, self-pity and slip-shod sentiment, I at all costs avoid them in my man to man writings.

I felt with deep fervour that all over the country, and indeed, as it had proved, our Empire as well, are men and women who, with the usual inarticulateness of our race, hide their inner feelings only because no one encourages them to air them. They make mistakes, suffer disappointments, grow depressed and disheartened, and find in religion nothing but stern preachings and threats of awful punishments. And Hell fire.

I had too made mistakes, suffered disappoint-

ments, grown depressed and been snubbed by my religion. So why should I not try through my pen and the world-wide circulation of my paper to get in touch with all these human beings and help them . . . as a human being like themselves.

My articles at first were ridiculed and laughed at. But I kept on, and my paper never wavered. Till surely there came to me the confidences of men and women of all walks of life. One year I had nearly 35,000 letters from total strangers . . . not silly, mushy letters but letters teaching me by example, such bravery, such unrewarded courage, such day by day "guts" that my faith in human nature grew and grew. As I wrote to my readers on a Friday and maybe helped them a little, so they helped me. They talked to me. I talked to them. And we were not shy, not self-conscious. That is all there was to it. That is all there is to it.

It all seemed so worth while one day when there was published on the leader page of the *Daily Mail* a wonderfully generous article about my work by my talented colleague, Douglas West. In the course of it he wrote : "He has got under the skin of many hundreds of thousands of men and women . . . to the mawkish, the sentimental, the dithering, he can give little . . . It is because in shepherds' cottages, in great ports, in suburban villas, in office buildings, and schools, his fellow human beings have recognised in Collie Knox a congenial temperament, a direct and ungullable mind, that they have shown an increasing disposition to listen to him in a wider field."

The man who would not feel proud of that would be a liar. He would also be a fool and a humbug.

The following day I received a letter from my old chief, Lord Lloyd . . . " This morning's article in the *Daily Mail* inspires me to write a line in endorsement of its tribute. Let me say that no one rejoices more than I do for I know how hard you have worked and how richly you deserve all you are now reaping." Hannen Swaffer wrote in an article " Collie Knox . . . the dog . . . has in a few short months made for himself a reputation on the *Daily Mail*, a reputation the *Daily Express* did not want."

I am an ordinary fellow, and these and many other kind and encouraging words gave me a glow. It were foolish to deny it. Not a glow of self-satisfaction or self-appreciation, for, thank God, I have gone through too much ever to suffer from swollen-head, that affliction of the half-baked and unintelligent . . . but just to show how privileged, how strangely privileged I am.

Not everyone is lucky enough to be made aware week by week that his work, that all he is fighting to do . . . is receiving its reward. I do at least know that I have made numberless unknown friends, and that now and then something I have said, some almost forgotten experience of mine has seen some other traveller safely round the bend in the road. In this way I repeat I am privileged. Beyond adequate expression.

I do not consider myself to be an inspired prophet, crusader, or world force . . . or anything

ghastly like that. Nothing whatever of the kind. I have a nature which instinctively draws me to my fellow men . . . which makes me love to get at them and tear down barriers between us. To jump a stile together.

By a fluke I am able to convey feelings and emotions by the written word much more vividly than I could ever convey by the spoken word. Here is another compensation . . . in full measure. It seems almost as if Fate gave me a hesitation in my speech for a purpose.

I am surrounded by brilliant journalists such as Gilbert Frankau, S. E. Head, Robert Prew (the all-wise), Jimmy Lawrence, Charles Graves, Seton Margrave, Douglas West, Harold Conway, Clive MacManus, Julian Phipps, Paul Bewsher, Ann Temple (a remarkable woman this), Wilson Broadbent, Stanley Doust, Gordon Beccles, Sidney Horniblow, Percy Izzard and F. W. Memory, and many more. Never since the first day I came to my new job, an interloper . . . comparatively unknown, have I had anything from them but the most generous co-operation and valued friendship.

It is difficult to say more about my immediate chiefs because I am still on the *Daily Mail* staff . . . for I would not wish them to feel embarrassed . . . I have said as much as I have dared in order to show that in this strange Street of Ink and broken pencils, of turmoil, noise and artistry, there abounds a great Loyalty. Jealously hides its head . . . If it occasionally pops out from its retiring place it is given short shift. And its green eyes are blackened.

For us all it is "the paper," the whole time. For myself it is the men and the paper equally, for I am of such a mould that without some human being to work for and serve directly, I cannot give of my best. Occasionally people say to me, "I suppose you are such a big bug that you are great pals with Lord Rothermere and Esmond Harmsworth."

I have never spoken to Lord Rothermere. I have never even seen him. Mr. Harmsworth I know slightly. They both doubtless regard me no more and no less than they do the many other workers on this great newspaper . . . trusting in their loyalty . . . treating them well when they work well, and caring for them when they are ill. I would have it no other way.

It is perhaps the most noteworthy event in modern journalism that Mr. Esmond Harmsworth, this tall, good-looking, forceful youngish man who is now Chairman of Associated Newspapers, and wields great power, has in so short a time shown such drive and so astonishing a "flair." His grasp of the multitudinous details of a newspaper astonishes the technical experts and the men who have been in journalism all their lives. Mr. Harmsworth has a reserved manner, but he is vital and brilliant.

I do not angle for the favour of princes. I have known what such favours can mean . . . or more concisely what they cannot mean. I am aware that one or two other newspapers have angled for my services . . . and I am grateful to them. They pay me a compliment and a compliment to the men I now serve.

But I have found on the *Daily Mail* something I have never quite found anywhere else . . . I have found peace of mind. Generosity and a gratifying trust.

When I am of no further use to the *Daily Mail*—when I cease to find personal encouragement therein . . . or when I am no longer fit enough to stand the anxiety and strain of carrying on with my present work . . . then certainly I shall leave. And perhaps that day will soon dawn. Till then, so long as I am wanted . . . so long as I receive the personal "understanding," I shall remain. And my talents, such as they are . . . and my loyalty, are at its service. If my popularity with the public wanes I know I shall have to make way. It is the undeviating Law of the Jungle.

The *Daily Express* took me in and allowed me to learn my job at its expense. I am for ever grateful. It let me go . . . it did not choose to "bring me out" or develop me. But that was its business. My moment was not yet, and it knew it.

Across the street I found what I was looking for. So short a journey. Just a few steps. . . . So it always is in the fortunes of mankind . . . a pace to the right . . . a pace to the left . . . to whatever the gods may bring. An hour of bright lights —and then good-bye.

A girl said to me one night at dinner "How wonderful to be such a well-known journalist. Aren't you glad you are not a common reporter?"

I replied, "Whether I am common or not is a matter of opinion, but I am most certainly a

reporter. Why deny me the proudest title of our craft ? "

All we curious folk whose outpourings are turned neatly and expeditiously into print . . . and then as quickly are forgotten . . . are reporters . . . of life, of death—of hope and fears . . . and, above all, of our own souls.

If, after I leave the Street called Fleet for the quiet backwaters, I am remembered long enough for one of my colleagues to say of me " He was a good reporter," then I shall be well content.

His words shall be richly carved upon my tombstone—so proud an epitaph—so hard-won an accolade.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BEHOLD this is the House which Reith built. When fifteen years ago a very tall, lanky Scots engineer from Glasgow, with a forbidding countenance and a scar—an honourable scar withal—seared down one side of his face, answered an advertisement for a General Manager for the British Broadcasting Company, he certainly did British broadcasting . . . within limits—a bit of good. At the same time he did Mr. John Reith a bit of good, which consummation, for any man burning with such ambition and so insatiable a lust for personal power, was highly satisfactory.

I have had so much to do with broadcasting. Maybe too much—perhaps I am too close to it, but it is my considered opinion that while Sir John Reith did radio a service when he took it in hand he did it an equally benign service when he decided to leave it in June, 1938, for other aerial adventures.

He left Broadcasting House and its attendant "regions" so over-organised that it was positively costive. It remained for the new Director-General to supply the purge in large and immediate doses.

The "great organiser's" announced departure for the Chairmanship of Imperial Airways was marked by a frenzied outburst of praise from a great many people who had never served under his

[*Photo by permission of the B.B.*

SHOOTING A SCENE FROM "VICEROY SARAH" AT THE TELEVISION SET, ALEXANDRA PALACE. MARIE NEY AS THE DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH, BARBARA EVEREST AS QUEEN ANNE, AND OLAF OLSEN AS PRINCE GEORGE OF DENMARK.

[*To face p.* 3

rule. The writers who know nothing whatever about the inside history of the B.B.C. over the past eight years concentrated entirely on recording that this man had made the B.B.C. the finest broadcasting service in the world. They did not mention the trails of dissatisfaction, of deafness to public demands and interests which the Reith Dictatorship brought in its train. Also they did not record that the gradual, but slow, improvement in broadcasting programmes and in staff conditions have been brought about chiefly because the ex-Director-General became increasingly aware that the public were at last determined to chivvy him.

Even his sternest critics must remember—and will remember—that Sir John was the pioneer of broadcasting in Great Britain. He had no precedents—he had much to grapple with and perforce had to lay down his own rules. He had knowledge, prudence and energy—but too little humanity.

Willingly do I concede him his virtues and that British broadcasting is a wonderful organisation *qua* organisation. It has not deteriorated into a blasting loud speaker for the benefit of patent medicines and quack remedies for two reasons . . . neither of which is entirely Reith.

The British Government, in spite of the strongest opposition and representations from highly interested parties, has seen to it that included in the Charter of the British Broadcasting Corporation is the clause that no direct advertising by air shall be allowed.

The second reason is that the newspapers, of one

or two of which Sir John has always been heartily afraid, are solid to a man against the dissemination of air advertising. Who shall blame them? The life-blood of a newspaper lies in its advertising columns. No newspaper proprietor who has hundreds of men and women in his employ is in business only for the good of his health. There are shareholders to be considered. Salaries must be weighed and the proprietor himself must be soothed. I put the greatest of these three last.

Consider. So deeply interested was Sir John Reith in keeping the listener's ears away from sponsored programmes that for years he insisted that the B.B.C. Sunday programmes should be so appallingly dull, so unbelievably smug, so altogether devoid of any popular appeal, that hard workaday millions were perforce forced to tune into foreign advertising stations abroad in order to prevent themselves cutting their throats from sheer depression.

The foreign advertising stations owe Sir John a vast debt of gratitude. The more he impressed his nonconformist conscience on the public of Great Britain the more did these same listeners encourage the patent pink pills disseminators from over the water. Newspaper advertising of course is entirely different.

When, largely owing to a nation-wide campaign by the *Daily Mail*, which I ran with daily increasing blood pressure and toil, the Sunday programmes were brightened, I visualised delegations of aerial business men . . . who owned and ran these foreign stations . . . going in plain vans to protest

to Sir John. Why was he toning down his conscience? They liked his conscience. They found it convenient and immensely lucrative.

I most willingly admit that Sir John is a man of great personality and push, and no one will refute that he has unusual powers of organisation. But there comes a time in any organisation when the organiser loses his head. He is so eternally conscious that he is an organiser. So he continues to organise.

By the time he has finished he has organised not only the machine but all the men, women and children serving the machine. A ramification like the B.B.C. should exist for three special services . . . for the entertainment, and if needs must, for the pleasurable instruction of the listener, and in case of national emergency.

In times of national emergency . . . or national events the B.B.C. has excelled, for here what is required is organisation only. In the realm of entertainment the B.B.C. has not excelled because the moment you start over-organising the artistic temperament and turning creative brains into robots, you defeat your own purpose.

If, of course, your own purpose is to make machines of your purely creative and artistic staff, you are delighted at your conjuring trick. But this is not the purpose for which the Director-General of a broadcasting service . . . paid for and sustained by public moneys . . . is paid several thousand pounds a year in salary and " allowances."

I am always inclined to the belief that Sir John Reith was wont to recite Rudyard Kipling's " IF "

in his lighter hours—to himself. For he has most assuredly met with triumph and disaster and treated those two impostors just the same. So much so that he has failed to see any difference between them. The disaster of radio from the listeners' view . . . which is practically the only angle that should matter . . . has been chalked up on Reith's calendar along with his triumphs. In his opinion.

Sir John went to a difficult job in which his highly peculiar qualities will have full sway, to bring order out of occasional chaos. He is a shrewd man, and a man with considerable, though questionable, vision. But he is not a strong man.

I hold that he is not a strong man, because at the B.B.C. he concentrated all his authority under his own hand by a process of delegated instructions. He had hidden well away from the limelight, not so much that he was a shy, retiring flower, but because he never answered a question if he could help it.

He had an astonishing faculty for making friends in high places, and in times of public indignations and Parliamentary criticism he has been so well protected that his critics have been confounded. This, added to a forbidding manner. He has walked away from Parliamentary criticism. If any one Member of Parliament had taken the trouble to learn about broadcasting and what really went on at Broadcasting House, things would have been very different.

But Members of Parliament do not know, or do not care, about broadcasting, except inasmuch as

the microphone is a mighty useful weapon at, before, or during an election campaign. Rather than quarrel with the controlling microphone god they would let him get away with anything lest at a crucial moment in their Parliamentary lives they found Broadcasting House barred to them.

This is very natural in a material world, but extremely galling to someone like myself who has seen the owner of the head which ought, on several occasions, to be on a charger get up and walk out of the execution chamber and cock a snook at the discomfited executioners.

On one occasion one of the B.B.C. chiefs . . . had the consummate gall personally to suggest to me at a London club that if I altered my "approach" to Broadcasting House and toned down my public attacks on its Director-General, maybe the said Director-General would receive me with kindness and might pat me on the back. In measured terms I informed the messenger that apart from being insulting he was obviously labouring under mental duress. I wanted nothing from his Master.

So far the Board of Governors of the B.B.C. have been like performers in a French farce. They for ever came out of those self-same doors wherein they went. As they are a small body and their term of office is only for five years, they are dependent for knowledge and advice upon the chief executive. They have interfered at times, but when a Director-General constantly represents any decision which is likely to be unpopular as being forced upon him

by order of the Governors they have a poor time of it.

Sir John Reith, it seemed to me, ruled by fear and by delegation. He surrounded himself with an inner circle of lieutenants who had to take the responsibility for interpreting his wishes.

Such men as Mr. Cecil Graves and Mr. H. E. Nicolls, the Programme Controller, are lovely and pleasant in their lives, I am sure, but neither of them to my mind knows the first thing about public entertainment. The former Deputy Director-General, Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Carpendale, retired some time after the usual age limit of B.B.C. service following a striking radio career of quarter-deck mannerisms. Yet he had his qualities.

One night I was especially anxious to hear a radio show because it was novel and interesting and I wished to hear it under the most favourable conditions. To give any fair criticism of any radio production you must hear it where flawless reception is paramount. So, at considerable inconvenience to myself, I went to one of the listening rooms at Broadcasting House. There were other callers there. The performance started and we lent our ears, in silence. Half-way through the broadcast the door was flung open and in came Admiral Carpendale attired in evening clothes accompanied by two damsels of refinement and beauty. The Admiral, apparently being blind to the fact that the room was full of critics and other guests, began talking in a battleship voice, whereupon I sat up and requested him to stop talking.

Turning pale puce he glared, stopped talking and went out of the room.

Next day I wrote a letter of protest to the Programme Controller suggesting that when newspaper critics take the trouble to give up their evenings to attend at Broadcasting House the better to judge a B.B.C. programme, they should be allowed to listen in silence. I received a very courteous letter in return. Now in the B.B.C. listening rooms are large signs, tastefully coloured and immaculately painted, bearing the words " Silence please."

No recognised system of promotion has been in force at the B.B.C. Under the Reith banner long service and hard work of themselves brought little. The B.B.C. is full of dead heads . . . of " passengers " . . . people who have been promoted to responsible posts as an experiment, found incompetent, but not dismissed. Instead they have been found jobs in cosy backwaters—at the same cosy salaries.

The reason why the newspapers have been full of B.B.C. reorganisation stories and changes-over is due to these constant mistakes in appointment or promotion. Sometimes staff were shuffled throughout, and departments were wildly re-grouped. Outsiders with no previous experience of broadcasting were brought in and set over the heads of the older departmental chiefs.

The public will never get the programmes they want while the men responsible . . . the lower-grade men who do the real work . . . are never encouraged.

No man's salary was raised because his ideas, his methods of production, his personal treatment of artists had won him public acclaim and favour. Any man who won the regard of the listener was, *ipso* Reitho, doomed.

Will Sir John Reith deny that once he caused to be reproved one of his high salaried officials for "over-emphasising the good relations prevailing among his staff"?

One of the strongest causes for public dissatisfaction has been that the B.B.C. does not, except when owing to a ruling of the Ullswater Report it advertises certain posts in the newspapers, publish or make known to any of its employees any regular scales of salaries. One of the rules in the staff regulations ran: "All salaries and wages are confidential and should not be the subject of unofficial discussion."

Professor Ogilvie, the new Director-General, would be wise to take over himself the functions of Programme Controller. Radio programmes should be considered of primary importance at Portland Place, and considerably less money should be spent on elaborate schemes for educating the British public.

The British people resent being forcibly educated. We resent, for such is our nature, being told what to do with our spare hours and being ordered to like aerial effusions which were dull, prosy and sometimes smacked of a strong Left Wing political bias. The licence-payer is the man who pays for the programmes and for the salaries of the approximately

two thousand souls who are now on the pay-sheet of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Thus, as the licence-holder pays the piper, he should call the tune.

When the piper goes shriekingly off the note the listener dislikes being told that he had better mind his own business and accept gratefully what he is so ungraciously bidden to receive.

In all the years in which I have written about radio and all its ramifications I have unceasingly waged war on behalf of the listener.

Of late, conditions improved in this direction, and the new department of Public Relations under Sir Stephen Tallents evolved schemes for coming into contact with the listener. For years the B.B.C. had to its hand the perfect contact for contacting the listener, namely the microphone. No chief official or producer till lately ever thought of saying at the conclusion of a programme "Now let us know what you think of our work. Do you like it? If not, why not? If you do not like it we will try to improve it." That would have been considered beneath the dignity of men who had no real dignity at all, for any man who is terrified of losing his dignity never in reality has any dignity to lose.

The general lack of a spirit of humanness, of understanding or sympathy, had for too long kept the senior staff of the B.B.C. in a constant state of tension, nerves and intrigue.

No principle of "divide and rule" in any such organisation could ever have anything but disastrous results . . . disastrous for any foresighted

or public-spirited man. But not at all disastrous for the Yes Men.

The nervous tension attendant on such a policy of rule not only gives birth to much unhappiness and ill health, but must have been largely responsible for the weary series of resignations which have marked these last few years. It is scandalous that human material should be exploited, used up and ruthlessly cast aside.

In February, 1935, it was reported, so I understand, to Sir John Reith officially by the head of the Programme Division, that there was a general sense of grievance, a feeling of frustration and a genuine anxiety about the widening gap between promise and performance.

There was unanimous criticism of the methods and the spirit of the administration. It was complained that strain on the personnel was heavy, that breakdowns were occurring with growing frequency. People were so closely tied up with the problems of the moment that they had no time either for reflection or for planning. The report analysed the causes on these lines . . .

(1) Irrational administrative obstruction and delaying of requirements essential to efficient programmes.

(2) Rule of thumb methods to the exclusion of proper consideration of important intangible factors and personal judgment.

(3) The aloofness of the administrative mind from actuality, and its disregard of working conditions and of steadily improving standard.

(4) Lack of confidence, a disheartening degree of checking up and of casting doubt on expert opinion . . . lack of imaginative and sympathetic treatment.

Nothing was done. To this hour the men who were largely responsible for the bursting of this overdue outburst . . . repeated, I was told, the following year at a meeting of the Programme Board . . . are in key posts at the B.B.C.—have been promoted.

So secure was the hierarchy in going its own dictatorial way that, I understand, the Director-General of the B.B.C. had a copy of the Ullswater draft report in his possession as early as Christmas, 1935, before it came before the House of Commons. His observations were recorded upon it, and the final report had the benefit of those views.

The general public may ask themselves . . . they might even ask me if they felt so inclined . . . in what manner internal dissension and dictatorial methods affect them, being concerned only, as they are, with programmes good, bad or indifferent. I would reply to them, thereby replying to myself as a member of the general public, that no man on this earth can do efficient work if his mind is torn and his nerves are stretched by pin-pricks and espionage. One member of the B.B.C. said to me that his wife was expecting a baby, but that he was most uneasy as he had forgotten to ask official permission to add to the population in his own time.

Everything that occurs at Broadcasting House is

most closely the concern of the public. We are a trusting race and are ever inclined to prefer not to be bothered or to see the trees for the wood. Our policy of magnificent ignorance is truly magnificent, but it does on occasions give other men too long a rope. The undoubted fact that the other men will in time hang themselves cannot be denied. But until the hour of the hanging dawns much harm can be done and much alarm and despondency spread by the hangees.

Television is, of course, the coming force. It is now well on its way. How the staff at Alexandra Palace have managed to put over the shows they do put over in spite of appalling lack of space, lack of money, and every sort and condition of discouragement from their head office, is to me one of the miracles of the present age.

The B.B.C. old-timers held up television so long as they dared. They visualised it as inevitably pushing them out of their pleasant jobs as television calls for very special experience. The men at Alexandra Palace are the only people who know about its entertainment—production end—a small handful of enthusiasts led by their Director, Gerald Cock. Mr. Cock is a man of vision and courage and is "strong" in that he will take advice and will go the way that is best for the public. Artists like him, and his staff like him. They work for him the clock round. I have made no secret of the fact that in my opinion he should be made Programme Controller of Television and Sound broadcasting. It is unlikely that this will come to pass

for he knows his job backwards—an impassable barrier for too long to B.B.C. promotion.

If, as should happen, some of the men at present in high command at the B.B.C. follow their late chief and patron into retirement or into other fields of endeavour, men like Mr. Cock will reap their reward. And the public will get its reward in them.

The B.B.C. chiefs spent too much money. The resident symphony orchestra costs some £100,000 a year. . . . Money was poured out on building enormous regional studios which are seldom utilised, and on schemes with small popular appeal, such as opera studio broadcasts. The spendthrifts found that they had no money left to devote to the development of television. If this is the result of the master organisation—of the master organiser, then I have lost my sense of values and the truth is not in me.

On February 24th, 1938, the B.B.C. issued a dramatic ultimatum to the effect that there was to be " more money or poorer programmes " . . . a scream of poverty on an income of £3,356,000. The same day the Supplementary Treasury Estimate issued an increase of the 1937 grant . . . for which the taxpayer pays . . . of £2,870,000 by £360,000. It was supplied without the stewards being called on for any account of their stewardship.

I had long warned the public that the day would come when the B.B.C. would cry poverty . . . and expect the public to rush to the rescue without questioning the efficiency of the organisation or its

" organiser." No item of B.B.C. had ever been questioned, because no one in authority has ever been in a position to question it.

By its own admission on that February 24th the B.B.C. had no funds available for new capital expenditure . . . and no reserve fund. Vast sums were spent on programmes which had only a minority appeal. After the first of the very expensive new series of studio opera broadcasts a short while ago of the opera " Manon," the B.B.C. told me proudly they received FORTY letters.

The B.B.C.'s audience at that time in its history was reputed to be at least 15,000,000 people every night.

This opera scheme was launched when the B.B.C. was well aware that funds were getting low. The Training College costing £11,000 a year is principally for men who have already learned their radio jobs at B.B.C. regional stations.

Thus on this day the B.B.C. had to admit that its plans were held up . . . it could not continue television . . . foreign broadcasts . . . its building . . . some transmitter schemes already in operation, or its sound broadcasting day by day programmes . . . these last without a falling off in standard. IT HAD NO MONEY.

Four months afterwards Sir John Reith retired from the B.B.C. Almost the entire national Press hurled bouquets at him and said that this wonderful man had placed British Broadcasting in a position in which no one else could have placed it. With the last flower in this bouquet I unreservedly agree.

I refuse to belaud Sir John Reith to the skies. He has done many grand things for broadcasting. He has done many not so grand things. And he left the B.B.C. at a time when it was up to its neck in monetary difficulties and so over-organised that its right hand did not know what its left hand was doing.

Professor Ogilvie, who has to untangle the mess, has a hard task. The first thing he might do is to try to persuade the Treasury to give the B.B.C. a further share of the licence money.

He has a large unwieldy house to put in order. May Providence help him.

The one man whom I unhesitatingly would have placed in charge of the B.B.C. long ago is now General Manager of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Major "Bill" Gladstone Murray. He left Broadcasting House after giving the B.B.C. unremitting service for twelve years. He was for a long while Sir John Reith's right-hand man . . . but he was too able a right hand . . . too far-seeing a man. He became Assistant Controller of Programmes in 1935 . . . and his views on broadcasting and its proper conduct were apparently too Imperial for the scions of Broadcasting House.

Murray was too popular . . . too much trusted. As Controller of Public Relations he smoothed every quarrel between the B.B.C. and the Press with an amazing tact. On one occasion the editors of the principal London newspapers gave him a dinner, an unheard of event . . . considering that it was Murray's job to see that the Press did not get too

much news about the B.B.C. without "every avenue being explored." The newspapers knew that if they wished to fulfil their legitimate function and print radio news that should in the public interest be ventilated they had a friend in Murray.

Gladstone Murray by sheer personality and the esteem he won for himself as an individual did wonders to prevent any public danger of misunderstanding of the B.B.C. To him Sir John Reith owes a very great deal. His reward was a terrible year of anxiety and his practically forced acceptance of the Canadian job which he has made into a great success. But he should never have been allowed to leave the B.B.C. . . . never have been so thwarted and "shut out" that he had no choice but to go.

Bill Murray and his wife are two of the most real people I have known. They are dear friends of mine. In sickness and health, in prosperity and adversity they are friends in action and not only in name.

I have benefited beyond measure by Bill Murray's advice and influence at the right moment. It was largely to him that I went all out as a radio commentator and took broadcasting as my speciality.

It became known at the B.B.C. that Bill and I were close personal friends, and that was not healthy for my friend. They do not like me on the administrative floor at Broadcasting House. From the moment it was learned that Bill and I had much in common and that we were both keen to see radio take on an Imperial outlook, and see radio

concentrate on spreading abroad tales of the greatness of our own country we were in for a fight. He to war against suspicion and distrust within his own house of business . . . I to carry on with my work in spite of being put on " a black list " and being followed about Broadcasting House as if everyone was terrified lest I should dart into an office and pinch a document out of a file.

Broadcasting can be such a vast power for good, and for harm. In the wrong hands it could be frightening in its potentialities for evil. The microphone carries the human voice into millions of homes . . . a radio " speaker," cleverly primed, can stir up dissension, cast doubt over an entire nation and undo the workings for peace and goodwill of a harassed Government.

Its lighter side is just as important in its own way for the welfare of the people. A nation that can be kept amused and soothed by so all pervading an instrument for amusement and relaxation, and happily put over " education " will not readily panic or fall into the arms of the crank and the anti-national.

The B.B.C. should be international. It should in no way be anti-national.

The B.B.C. must give both sides of every question, and the task of keeping the balance is admittedly a very difficult task ; but under the control of a citizen who is first and foremost a patriot, a man who is proud of the country of his birth and of his fellow citizens the B.B.C. can do inestimable work in keeping the warring wolf from our doors.

I have always pressed for the radio rights of the "man in the street" . . . for radio is the entertainment of the million. Occasionally I have been attacked for striving in my radio articles for good honest entertainment and gay music by those who sneer at my lack of taste and artistic perception.

What these people do not realise is that it is not my job as radio columnist and critic of the *Daily Mail* to render prayers to heaven for the radio programmes which I happen personally to like. I can go to the theatre or the cinema whenever I choose to go, and more often than not when I would not choose to go. Radio is primarily for those who live in remote places or under conditions in which every penny counts and a shilling seat at the pictures means that some little luxury has to be foregone.

The sick, the aged, the weary and the lonely . . . the men and women in our hospitals . . . the bedridden and the afflicted for such as these . . . and so many of them write to me and give me the privilege of their friendship though unknown to me by sight . . . the miracle of radio brings the miracle of amusement, melody and world knowledge into their homes. Even the deaf can hear the radio . . . and for the blind no words of mine need attempt to describe what radio can mean.

It is right that "the others" should be considered, for they pay their money and the man who pays his money expects his goods. I am not unduly moved when the symphony music lover, the opera

habituées and the harpsichord devotees complain to me that they are to be as generally considered as, well, as " those others."

To the men and women who can go to the opera and the Queen's Hall, radio is a luxury . . . just a luxury to be toyed with when there is nothing special to do at the moment and it is too wet, or too much of a bore, to go out.

To the ordinary men and women and their children, from the suburbs to the lonely hut on the hill, radio is a necessity.

The life of a conscientious radio writer is in many ways an unenviable one. For myself, when I contemplate the billions of words I have written about every aspect of radio and the human and sub-human beings it employs, I nearly faint with horror. I have already used up most of the words in the dictionaries.

I have lived to see many reforms which I have " passed on " creep into the programmes without acknowledgement. They are curious folk at the B.B.C. They hate to admit that they are following advice . . . a weakness . . . and that they must in the long run fall into line with what the public wants. It is like playing a game. It is all right so long as you know the rules and understand the mentality of the people with whom, and against whom, you are playing.

Sometimes I am accused of being too outspoken. I may be wrong and no doubt I frequently am, but I do feel that if one is always meticulously careful to give praise where praise is justly due, so one should

throw bombs when a bombardment is justly indicated.

We all realise that it is beyond any B.B.C. power to please thirty million people at one and the same moment. But what has been so sadly lacking and what I have fought so hard to achieve for the listener, is that the B.B.C. shall show more openly . . . more generously . . . a real earnest desire to meet its employers half way.

If the B.B.C. nabobs are conscious of their dignity no one else is. The public certainly is not. It is not seemly for employees to put on airs. After all the B.B.C. and its public should strive together only to one common end . . . to attain, and maintain, the best and most representative programmes in the world. But you cannot work with men who put on their eyeglasses and talk through their noses at you.

When we have rid the B.B.C. of humbug . . . of pseudo highbrowism and of its gigantic inferiority complex we shall have done something big.

The swanker . . . and the dignitary who shuts himself away in his office and can never be seen is merely expressing his mania to be " different " . . . to make his mark in a negative way, anything to pander to his own deep-seated feeling of inferiority. It is thus with a man. It is thus with an organisation.

The theatre and the film fought shy of radio. They cried that it would ruin their business. I did not agree with this view—this narrow view. The

time was to dawn . . . when all three forms of public entertainment would work together for the good of the public and for the better upkeep of their own box offices.

A vast amount of unmitigated balderdash is written about " radio stars."

Every mortal who sings, cracks jokes or bellows into a microphone is labelled a radio star. There are precious few of them worth the title. A radio artist is a star who can give a performance alone in a studio with no audience, with original material, who can by sheer force of personality and voice project himself into the very room.

They can be counted on the fingers of two hands. Variety shows . . . and music hall broadcasts may be good entertainment but they are not of the stuff of radio. The radio is intimate . . . a song to just one person, a talk to a fellow sitting opposite. The art is already dying.

I never meet radio performers privately if I can avoid it. I wish to keep an open mind. Never have I written nor ever will I write of their private lives, of how they decorate their rooms or of what they eat for dinner.

My concern is only with the result which comes from my loud speaker. Those who are my personal friends or acquaintances I put to the most severe test of all . . . and they would have it so.

A critic who receives favours and says a word here, a word there . . . so as to get a free seat at a theatre or a cinema or be asked to a cocktail party of would-be celebrities, is digging his own grave as

a critic. The very artists who have him in the hollow of their hands gleefully despise him.

Dog does not eat dog, but I strongly feel that no man who sets out to pass public judgment through his newspaper on a living artist or on the activities of the B.B.C. should write for broadcasting. Too many of them are doing this at the moment . . . have fallen into the trap which the B.B.C. has so cunningly laid for them. The B.B.C. producers encourage journalists to write plays and sketches and to compere performances for them . . . making them in a flash paid minions and throttling their considered criticism for ever.

Were I a newspaper proprietor or an editor, which heaven forfend, I would instantly dismiss any member of my staff who wrote for the B.B.C. who accepted money in payment from the B.B.C. . . . that member of my staff being a man whose duty it was to act as an impartial critic for my newspaper.

Such an employee is cheapening himself and cheapening the newspaper which employs him.

Broadcasting has given singularly few personalities from its staff end . . . singularly few men who have had the courage to push their own ideas and to fight internal jealousies. Eric Maschwitz, once Director of Variety, is an exception. He is gay and he is clever and his brain is facile. Many of the things he did I disagreed with, for he was too easily swayed by his own predilections for certain artists and ran them to death. But he gave radio many new angles and his personality and drive were vivid and energetic.

I like him personally and I have attacked him

as heartily as I have co-operated with him. We remain friends.

He wrote "Balalaika," the musical comedy which turned into so staggering a success and paved Mr. Maschwitz's future with gold so that he left the B.B.C. and is now very much in the money. Unfortunately, as I think, he had certain extracts from "Balalaika" broadcast, and this was asking for trouble in his position—as the broadcasts did undoubtedly do a lot to put "Balalaika" on the primrose path, for it had started off none too well. Yet he took his opportunity, and who shall blame him?

But when Maschwitz left the B.B.C. something very vital went with him . . . and for all his funny little ways he did tremendous work.

Broadcasting will ever claim my gratitude, for it gave me three dear and close friends, Christopher Stone, Mabel Constanduros and Robert Tredinnick. They are all remarkable people and the milk of human kindness flows in their veins.

Christopher Stone is the best British broadcaster who ever lived. His way with him at the microphone . . . his informality and uncanny flair for personal approach has won him millions of adherents. He became so popular and so much of a force that the B.B.C. not only let him go, but appeared glad to hasten his departure. Any personality, any man with the popular touch . . . with the "common touch" of Kipling was always doomed . . . in the old régime. For the gods of broadcasting were jealous gods.

Sometimes when I was tired and utterly at odds

with myself and the world I would go down to Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Stone's lovely house, Wiston Old Rectory, in Sussex. From their wide understanding and genius for friendship and for "giving" I would emerge refreshed . . . and shoulder anew the burden of the day with a lighter heart. They are indeed lovely and pleasant in their lives, these two. Their marriage is a poem of comradeship and quiet content. They are utterly sufficient unto one another . . . and will so remain till the end.

No one realises the work which Christopher Stone puts in for charities and the causes of the unfortunate and the sick and sore at heart. From behind those glasses gleam the steady eyes of a rare spirit. His time, his money and his heart are never his own, but are at the disposal of all who are in need, mental or physical.

A character of like beauty is Mabel Constanduros. She became famous over the air for her clever Cockney characterisation. In her small body beats an undefeated heart. She acts, writes, appears for charities and works fourteen hours every day. Her life is wrapped up in her son Michael, a charming good-looking boy who lately married his mother's secretary, Hilda Cobb. Mabel Constanduros's home life is smooth and easy flowing. She, too, lives in Sussex, that county of green fields, spreading downs and kindly souls. And Robert Tredinnick won his listener friends by the sincerity and steadfastness with which he wins his intimate friends.

If ever I feel that I am alone in the world and I

[*Photo : Howard Coster.*

MAJOR CHRISTOPHER STONE.

[*To face p.* 404.

know not which way to turn for succour or friendship, I shall remind myself that waiting to greet me are Christopher and Alice Stone, Mabel Constanduros and Robert Tredinnick . . . and if any man has the friendship of such as these he is very far from being lost or defeated.

A man to whom I owe much good advice and whom I was able to help in his beginnings is Henry Hall. This modest band-leader had a hard path to tread when he took over from Jack Payne at the B.B.C. But with acute business ability and perseverance he made his name ring throughout the country, and when he left the B.B.C. he left with flags flying. He achieved the miraculous feat of leaving not only on his own terms, but of persuading the B.B.C. to present him with its entire dance music library worth hundreds of pounds. He too has a wife . . . a shy, retiring woman, like himself from the north of England . . . and behind him at every step of his career she has stood. She is a woman who says little, but sees most of the game. The general public does not know her. She is almost the only woman alive who has said to me that she hates publicity and has truly meant it.

And so it will go on, this mighty broadcasting machine . . . till television is as accepted a part of the household furniture as much as the drawing-room grate. Nation will continue to speak unto nation, and it is my hope that they will speak Peace and Goodwill. In the microphone and the mighty transmitter lies a terrible power . . . we must see that it is wisely used, for the betterment of

mankind . . . for the closer understanding between World Powers and for the glory of our Empire.

No one can visualise to what extent television will develop in the coming years. No one could have foreseen fifteen years ago how radio would have spread its wings and be installed in the home of the rich man, the poor man, the beggarman, the thief.

A word whispered from a room in London and away it goes over the seas and the valleys and the unbridgeable rivers . . . till it falls on the ears of the exile and the men who dwell in the snows and ice.

The word is caught up and on it goes till it encircles the world and comes never to rest but wings on and on through the centuries . . . little sound waves that are never lost, that never die . . . but wait to be caught two years hence . . . a century hence . . . an age without a name.

For my own part I feel that soon I shall write no more about broadcasting. I have almost done enough. I am too close to it, I repeat.

I have watched radio grow and in my small way I have used my knowledge for the benefit of any who have cared to read my words. Others must come along who will interpret the wishes of the listeners and bring a new enthusiasm to the task. If I have ever achieved anything for the man at the end of the street or for the "little woman round the corner" by acting as spokesman when they are naturally inarticulate, then I am well repaid.

I have seen so many of the wheels go round and

I have watched so many disappointments at Broadcasting House and tried to put right so many injustices and crass stupidities that maybe the day is dawning when I must lay aside my radio-filled pen.

I recall with pride that I have "brought out" many young artists—among others, such as Webster Booth, Brian Lawrence, Len Bermon, Gordon Little, Bernard Hunter, Brian Michie and the clever young film-television actor, Olaf Olsen—for whom especially I prophesy a great future.

There will be others to take my place. There always are others to come along. But let me charge them to follow their own conscience no matter what it may cost them and to remember, always and invariably to remember, that the written word even these days is still a powerful instrument. A reputation may be marred, a cause may be lost by too hasty a recorded judgment . . . and the men and women who supply entertainment to the millions can lose all by the unfair bias of a critic whom the public have chosen as worthy to follow.

A cheap joke is easy, as easy as the cheap laugh. It is so simple to condemn and to destroy.

We all of us have letters we treasure. When I told Mr. C. B. Cochran I was writing a book he wrote to me in this wise :—

"My dear Collie,

"My power of expression is too limited to give you an adequate idea of what I think of your work. Perhaps the highest tribute which

I can pay to your articles in the *Daily Mail* is that I read them regularly, although my occupation gives me little time.

" It is embarrassing to pay personal compliments to a master-craftsman, but in no way am I perjuring myself.

Yours very sincerely,

" CHARLES B. COCHRAN."

A writer whose words are circulated to millions by virtue of the newspaper he serves must set himself a high standard of honour and integrity. He must be beyond the lure of smarmy compliments and deaf to the sycophant and the mediocre. He must neither pander nor be pandered to.

Then he will reap his reward by his own inner consciousness that, though he may at times be reviled and misunderstood, he has done nothing else but follow faithfully his own considered, untainted, unbribable judgment.

His judgment may be wrong. But let it at least be honest.

So it ever must be . . . from the journalist who is " just beginning " to the star writer whose name is known afar.

I love my profession and am jealous of its good name. The men who serve it are worthy of honour. I am proud to keep them company. The temptations in a journalist's life are manifold and for the opportunist it offers tantalisingly easy prizes.

I am merely one of a great number, but each one of us can strive towards this end . . . that we must

never let the public down . . . that we must never let ourselves down—or our employers.

Our readers render us their trust. It is a wonderful thought and should give us pause . . . all of us who live by the pen and use it, when we think fit, as a sword.

But the sword is two edged . . . and can turn swiftly and with deadly accuracy upon ourselves.

In my varied journeyings I have never met or lived among men who are so strong in adversity as my comrades of Fleet Street—so ready to give the hand of friendship—so forgiving of human failings.

Their reward is not apparent. It is nevertheless great—and deserved.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE Feats of the Young Men.

Whenever I have time to indulge in the luxury of quiet, silent reflection I ponder on the varying fortunes which have beset those who were young men when I was a young man. I wonder how we all managed to battle for our goals and retain whole skins. How many of us have indeed won to our goals?

Some of my contemporaries and those who are a trifle older, a trifle younger, than myself, have made great names for themselves and have left me a long way behind in the race. We were wont to talk together of what we should do . . . of the injustices we would put right in the world. . . . We quoted Disraeli with his " The time will come, gentlemen, when you WILL hear me . . . "—all the ambitions and imaginings of young folk when gathered together to let off repressed steam was ours.

I do not speak of my army life comrades or of those who were by right of family and upbringing in my life, but of those to whom I seemed fated to migrate because, perhaps all unknowingly, I had more in common with them than with my immediate circle.

Occasionally when anyone mentions Noel Coward

I find myself saying "Oh, I remember him when he was seventeen," and become acutely embarrassed at the awed silence into which the company falls. I realise I am expected to give vent to some inspiring and revealing pronouncement. But the memory of that amazing man at seventeen is not amazing to me, so I blush heavily and talk about the weather.

It is, I find, rather satisfying not to feel in the least excited at the thought that long ago before Noah went on his yachting excursion I knew Noel Coward, Ivor Novello, Beverley Nichols, poor Ned Latham, Gertrude Lawrence, Vivian Ellis, Frank Vosper, and John Gielgud better than I know them now. To me they are not heroes or heroines . . . or even weighty names, but just gay and careless fellow strugglers, for in such wise did some of them first cross my path.

When I was attempting, without much success, not to look like a baby dressed up in military uniform, a boy came to a party at which I was present. He was amusing and lively. We all liked him, for he had a way of giving vent to observations devastating in their directness. He was neither divinely tall nor divinely fair, but he had a very alive impertinent face and he was incapable of keeping still. He said what I considered rather dreadful things and talked unceasingly. Such was Noel Coward at seventeen, a boy actor flirting with the stage, and full of himself. A human soda water syphon . . . bubbling and sizzling.

He was so utterly unlike any boy I had ever met

. . . for he was years older than his age and made me feel very young indeed, that I took to him. He frightened me, for I had been brought up carefully to weigh my words and to wait till addressed. Master Noel weighed nothing, and has never waited for anyone or anything.

He was given an engagement to play a juvenile part in a play at the Garrick Theatre, and I went to see the play and to take him out " to a sandwich " afterwards. Noel, I thought, was very nearly the worst actor I had ever endured. He looked all wrong, he was gawky and he spoke as if his mouth were full of plums. He has shed some of the plums since then, though a few remain. I went round to see him afterwards and with the directness of a twenty-year-old I told him that he would be wise to take my advice and give up all hopes of a stage career. To this advice he gave his usual symphonic symphony imitation and became very amusing indeed.

Noel Coward determined to become a good actor and he succeeded. He determined to become a famous playwright, for he told me so once when we were eating ices at a theatrical garden party in between gazing with awestruck eyes at the constellations of the stage. He also determined that he would make a great deal of money. In all these laudable determinations he has succeeded and I trust that he is happy, though I doubt it. He was, when a boy, restless and nervy. . . . Success has done nothing to tone down either his restlessness or his nerves. Indeed they are rather worse than they were, if his looks belie him not.

One night a mutual friend of his was, at the age of eighteen, making a great hit in a revue at the Palace Theatre in London. Noel thought it would please me . . . for he always looked upon me as a simple soul . . . if he took me behind the scenes to see his friend. We duly arrived, and Noel sent in his card to see the young starlet. After waiting fifteen minutes, during which I had a job to prevent Noel from hitting the stage doorkeeper over the head, there came back a reply to the effect that the starlet was much too busy to see Mr. Coward.

Noel bit his lip and looked thoughtful. As we walked away he said in the mood of prophecy, " I am damned if he will ever act in any play of mine." And to the best of my knowledge he never has.

Noel Coward had a friend of his own age. The two were inseparable. His crony was a silent, black-haired boy, with much charm and a delicate constitution. With this boy Noel was ever at his best. It was a real friendship. The boy died before he was twenty, and I do sincerely think that from that moment a spark flickered and went out in Noel Coward's being. He was shocked to his heart's core. He grew deadened and hardened. He and his friend had planned to do so much together, as is the way that schoolboy friendships have, and death pounced unfairly and unawares.

I am asked if Noel Coward has altered much by success. I do not really know, for I have not seen him alone for years and he appears to have survived the loss. When I meet him at his first nights I

notice a tightening of the mouth and a drawn look round the cheekbones, but I hear him laugh in the same gay way.

He is like many folk. He remembers you and is delighted to see you if and when he sees you, but his life is so full . . . he has been such a success . . . and he has worked so hard that he grows out of people, never really having any need of people.

They tell me he is " high hat " and grand, and that he has lost his head. Maybe he has. Maybe he has not. But I prefer to think of him as I first knew him, and I have no doubt were I to telephone to him and suggest an outing, that he would sally forth with me just as he used to do. But I am just as busy as he is, in my own way, and our paths do not cross.

He probably classes me as just another journalist. He does not like journalists. He makes no bones about it. He feels that he can do without them. Here I disagree, but he has so far proved his words to be right. So far.

Ivor Novello is one of my oldest friends and he has suffered in everything he does from being compared with Noel Coward. " Brilliant, of course," they say, " but not so clever as Noel." I am not so sure. I have a premonition that Ivor will be remembered after Noel is forgotten, because he is more human and his humour is more kindly. He is now just as well known as Noel, and has probably made just as much money . . . and he gives the public entertainment without frills and the public likes it.

The pit and the gallery love Ivor, not only because of his astonishing good looks, but because he knows them and obviously likes them. They would have the same attitude towards Noel if he gave them a chance to get to know him.

Ivor and I wrote four or five songs for a revue called "A to Z," in which Gertrude Lawrence, then unknown, made a hit and Jack Buchanan caused London to sit up. Ivor wrote beautiful music. To my mind his earlier work is far and away simpler and more truly enchanting than his modern glamorous, clamorous nights and his crested waves.

Our songs, of which I wrote the words, were successful, which gave me immense gratification, especially as Ivor has never since written a tune to compare with our "Night May Have Its Sadness." He lived in a flat over the Waldorf Hotel—where he still dwells—and here he would give parties which were very amusing and famous in contemporary history.

He would play and sing the while every leading actor and actress in London sat on the floor and in turns "did their stuff" to yells of applause. Then after the guests had gone Ivor would write melodies and tell me to write words for them. It was all very jolly and exciting, and the jokes we cracked were very funny indeed. To us : then.

Ivor Novello deserves his success. He is not spoiled by public favour, for he has never grown up. He takes his fame and his fortune as a huge joke and is undoubtedly the most well-liked member of his profession. Whenever he sees me he cries out

" Oh Collie ! How delightful to see you again "—and he truly is delighted to see me. While he sees me. But off he goes to remember someone else, with all his old charm and sincerity, for he is sincere in an inexplicable way. He is in love with the world and the world has repaid the compliment.

I cannot grow used to the niche which John Gielgud has made for himself, for I cannot see him —as I am informed he is—as a great hope of the theatre. I only see him as I knew him first, delighted with five pounds a week. He never talked of the honour of the stage in those days or recited in a Terry voice. He was very merry and very young . . . and some of the most hilarious evenings I recall were spent with him and Frank Vosper.

The death of Frank Vosper stirred me deeply. It was so unnecessary. Here was a brilliant brain, how brilliant few people realise. He had a psycho-analytical mind, and an uncanny insight into the failings and virtues of human nature. He and I would talk by the hour and I grew to discover that behind that sometimes superficial exterior was a genuine person with intense feelings. As an actor he was at times almost great. As a playwright his finest play " People Like Us," in which both Marie Ney and Henry Oscar gave unforgettable performances, startled London by its insight and penetration, though London was only allowed to see it on a Sunday night.

Frank's untimely end made me angry and bewildered. He could ill be spared . . . and it

was unlike him to die in such a way. He never created a mystery without clearing it up, tying the loose ends neatly together like the craftsman he was. The stage lost a brilliant light the night the waves closed over Frank Vosper's head, and I lost a good friend.

Beverley Nichols has never altered since I first met him while staying with Ned Lathom near Liverpool. He is as keen as ever on reforming the unreformable and his crusades are undertaken with all his old spirit—to attack first and reconsider afterwards. He is a writer of great charm and a companion to while away a care. He started at an early age shocking the world by writing a school book : when he was eighteen. He has travelled far down the garden path since then. . . . He believes all he writes, of that I am convinced. But I am not so convinced that he says all he believes.

When I was struggling away on the *Daily Express*, a young and equally struggling composer did more to keep me pegging away at my then monotonous task than did any one else. Vivian Ellis can take credit for my sticking to journalism, if there be any credit to take. We wrote some songs together, for I still loved lyric writing. One of our songs did well, and when one song, " The Yale Blues," which we wrote in half an hour on a piano in Hampstead, circled the globe and sold millions of records I was aching to give up journalism and plunge into song writing.

It was Vivian who stopped me making a fool of myself and told me to keep pegging away. For one

who was then so wild and unrestrained, he is a bit of a genius in his own line . . . this young man had wide vision. He never lacked courage and determination. He was wont to tuck his latest compositions under his arm and go round and sit outside the offices of publishers and managers. He would sit for hours, be admitted and be asked to sit down and play his damned songs and get out. He has probably been more frequently insulted than anyone else in theatrical history, because it was—and is—impossible to get rid of him.

On one occasion I met him looking like a very white sheet. He was tired of playing over his songs, and it all seemed hopeless. He had played at an audition at Daly's Theatre the while scene shifters crashed scenes all over the stage and his auditioners smoked cigars and refused to listen. Whereupon young Vivian left his piano and said that he would be obliged if someone in the theatre showed some manners. He returned to his piano and played . . . in perfect silence . . . in perfect dignity.

Later he was to have four shows to his music on in the West End at the same time, and he is now the foremost of our light music composers. He still talks like an ever-running stream . . . is shrewder and much less bitter than he was. When he feels like it he can be the wittiest man in London.

These and many more . . . for I was with them at their beginnings. But perhaps the most unique character of them all, and a personality round whom all the "coming young men" clustered, is not known one quarter so well. Ned, the last of

the Earls of Lathom, left his mark on his time, and to his encouragement and generosity is due much of the success of the younger " names " of the day in journalism, the theatre and the concert platform.

Lord Lathom . . . though he was Ned even to his taxi driver . . . lived years before his time. He breathed his last one hundred years too late. He was a generous patron of the arts, with an appreciation for talent and artistry which was remarkable. His enthusiasms were as boundless as his purse. He financed plays, backed revues, gave financial aid to scores of actors, singers and a great many of the entirely undeserving. He held court wherever he went. He became a cult. To be taken up by Ned Lathom meant something, this old-looking young man with the tragic destiny.

He ran through an immense fortune, giving to all and sundry and entertaining like a Crœsus. He rebuilt his house at Blythe Hall, near Liverpool, at enormous costs. He gave theatrical performances there for his tenants and held a yearly week of rejoicing.

Twice I was of the party. Once, before Blythe was completed, he put us all up for a week at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool . . . Geoffrey Holmesdale (now Lord Amherst), Ivor Novello, Mrs. Ramsey, his great friend and a delightful woman, Olga Lynn, Herman Klein, Bobby Andrews . . . in his day the best boy actor I have seen and still a very competent actor, Donald Calthrop and a score more.

I shall not easily forget Blythe Hall. We ate off

gold plates at night and the house boasted a swimming bath of green marble, on whose shining walls an Associate of the Royal Academy had painted surprising figures at a surprising fee and had taken his time about it. Every bedroom had its bathroom, and carpets so thick and so soft that we nearly fell in them up to the neck. Even the lavatory seats were not lavatory seats, but tastefully carved armchairs . . . skilfully and embarrassingly designed for comfort and speed.

The whole house was impossible from start to finish, but altogether exhilarating. Over it all reigned the wan figure of our host, for he was far from strong physically. He used to shake with coughing fits . . . a forerunner of the consumption which was to kill him. His tenants adored him. The shows were wonderfully well done. During one of them Ivor and I sang a song which we had written as a joke, called " The Keepsake." It was an appalling song and we laughed so much when we were writing it that we expected the audience to turn us off the stage for daring to sing so dreadful a morceau. Not a bit of it. They devoured it.

Then and there I decided to go on the stage, but luckily I forgot about it when Donald Calthorp acidly remarked that it was a pity I sang " like that."

Poor Ned Lathom. He " missed " it in every way. He missed it even in his friends, for he was incapable of judging between the hanger-on and the sincere comrade. He was surrounded by second-rate people who battened on him and ate him up. His marriage to Xenia Morrison was a

failure. I was a sidesman at his wedding. He looked so happy and gay and eager. His old friends, like myself, shook his hand and saw the writing on the wall. He had made a bargain and he stuck to it. It was his way.

He galloped through all his money. Gone was Blythe Hall, gone were his suites at the Savoy Hotel and his eight valets . . . gone were his fifty dressing gowns and his hundreds of suits and gone, gone with the wind of insolvency, were his hangers-on, his sycophants, the horde who had lived upon him, relied upon him for breakfast, luncheon, dinner and supper . . . vanished in a flash. For the Earl of Lathom was poor and short of money . . . and " dear Ned " was left to die as best he could : like Oscar Wilde, beyond his means.

At least two of the men he has helped to fame and fortune rallied round him, Noel Coward and Ivor Novello. To their eternal credit it shall be said. I had become so sickened by the hangers-on that I had long left the courts of Lathom, but now I like to remember that I returned when my old friend had need of courage and help.

I went and chatted to him daily at his bed-sitting-room flat in Baker Street. There he lay in his bed, pale and drawn, coughing up blood . . . in pale pink silk pyjamas, and a rare painting saved from the wreck adorning the wall. He was merry and bright as ever. It was the most courageous act he had ever staged, and he had staged many. But this was the final act when the glory had departed and the rats had deserted the sinking ship.

"Good old Collie," he would cough, "still stammering. Never get cured, Collie, I would never forgive you." And we laughed together at our old joke, and I wanted to cry like a baby.

So he died. The last of his line and the last of his kind. Brave, delightful, tragic Ned. God rest him.

I have met scores of men and women whom the world dubs famous . . . but I promise faithfully I will not say anything about Somerset Maugham. Everyone writes about Somerset Maugham and his swimming pool in the South of France and his "cold grey eyes" and cynical soul. Rather do I turn to that delightful host—in himself—E. F. Benson. Dear Dodo Benson I remember told me a pleasing story about an opera star and a famous figure of contemporary musical life who ran Covent Garden opera seasons and breathed incredible witticism in his husky voice, so husky that it was like a frog croaking.

This good lady, rotund, internationally infamous, demanded an enormous fee for the season. Her reputation was international, not only for her singing. She was, in short, a great lover. When the "famous figure" had heard her out and had met her "outrageous" demand without batting an eyelid he leaned forward and hoarsed, "But, dear lady, WE ONLY WANT YOU TO SING." Dodo never tires of telling this tale.

I must be growing old. Whenever some budding author is talked about in hushed whispers, whenever an actor, an actress, a film star, a viceroy, a governor, a rajah, an artist or a murderer is mentioned,

I find that I can with complete truth pipe out, " Ah yes, I knew him or her years ago," or " I knew her when she was a chorus girl." I fear that I am fated to become a tiresome old man, who knows everybody and has known everybody.

My life has been varied and set in devious paths. My acquaintances are as the sands on the seashore. My friends are only as the number of fingers on my two hands, as must be the way.

When I was twelve I met my first famous man . . . it is fitting that here I shall flit back to my childhood, and begin in my mind all over again. My stepmother of whom I have told, took me to see her brother Sir Herbert Tree acting in " Hamlet " at His Majesty's Theatre. I donned my best Eton suit, washed my face—in that order—but failed to persuade my hair to lie down. So, very pink of cheek and with my hair standing on end, I met my stepmother-to-be in the foyer of the theatre. After the performance I was taken round to Tree's dressing room. The great man . . . for he was a great man as well as a great actor . . . towered above me and smiled. He was always charming to children. Then, putting his hand on my small shoulder, he pushed me over in the direction of the vast mirror which occupied a wall of the room. He stood behind me, and fell into silent contemplation. At last these words came forth in that wonderful Tree voice, " Ah, my dear little boy," it said, " one of these days you will be as tall as I am. Consider that, my dear boy. Consider that."

He then patted my head and turned to my step-

mother to be. " A sweet child, Aggie dear. Bring him again, bring him again."

On another poignant occasion—it was again during " Hamlet " at His Majesty's Theatre—I was standing talking to Tree in the middle of the stage when the curtain went up. Keen students of Shakespeare doubted whether it was " good production " for Hamlet to hold an animated discussion with a boy in an Eton suit on the edge of Ophelia's last resting-place.

Between Tree and his half-brother Max Beerbohm there was a strong bond of affection. Max the graceful, the elegant, the exquisite essayist and the inspired caricaturist is still one of the joys of my life. When he makes one of his infrequent visits to London from his enchanting little villa at Rapallo, he sends for me, and I sit in a chair and listen to Max while he walks up and down the room talking as only he can talk . . . pausing to say " Oh, Collie, if only I could work like you," and other such fantastic remarks. His beautiful hands will wave and make circles in the air as he tells of the giants of his days . . . of Bernard Shaw and all the Yellow Book writers . . . when there was dignity and no motor omnibuses.

Max is the supreme philosopher. He could have made a fortune by his writing. He did not choose to do so. He is happy pacing his sun-roof at Rapallo by the Italian blue sea, amid his fig trees and the sun. He and his wife together, well content.

He will say to me, " Tell me, who is this latest young actor, this author. I am so out of date."

STUMPED FOR "A WORD" IN MY GARDEN.

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And he will listen and say that it all sounds very wonderful and clever to be a young man of to-day, but he will not in truth be listening. His mind will be back in the days when he was the Beau Brummel of the town and his Zuleika Dobson set Oxford alight.

The lives of great men all remind us . . . I have known many great men, and a few great women. I have found in them a simplicity of purpose which has never failed to awe me into silence.

For these are the people who do things . . . who win fame . . . and the best of them are like children, unspoiled, courageous and eagerly appreciative of those who have come after.

All through my life I have proved that it is the great ones of the earth who are unconscious of their greatness. They have arrived, they have suffered and borne the heat and burden of the day. They realise that even the laurel wreaths of the conquerors wither in due season.

Thus, being wise in their regeneration, they are grateful for the simple things, the sight of an united family at its inviolate fireside, a sunset dyeing the sky crimson deep, the trail of smoke trailing carelessly from a cottage chimney on a summer evening, the song of birds, the handclasp of a friend, the nobility that is in all mankind.

Few things, if we face it, are so worth while as the joy of laughter and the love of friends. If indeed we walk in the gutter we can still look up—wanderers in a foreign land between the furrows and the stars.

I have little patience with inspired prophets who foretell the imminent disintegration of the British Empire and the race to which I am so proud to belong. The cry of the ravening wolf is ever abroad in the land . . . but it should not be difficult to keep it from our gates. The wolf is too often born and bred in this land of ours and seeks to devour those who have nourished and reared him.

My belief and my faith in our country, and in my fellow countrymen, may be foolish and optimistic, but it is nevertheless profound and will not be easily shaken. I believe in tradition, in the commonsense of the ordinary man and woman, and in the unvarying pride of history and its proud teachings. These beat in all our hearts, deny it how we may, as eternally as the sea beats against our shores.

The world is mad? Maybe. The world has always been mad, but it has its sane, fine moments . . . and in the end all our own fine sane moments will prevail.

I do not believe in carrying flags. But I would never knock a flag out of any man's hand.

For myself, so supremely unimportant a being, it remains for me to profit unceasingly from the lessons which I have learned and to do what I can to learn anew. And to profit anew. My ambitions are not so red hot or so unconsidered as they were . . . for I have found life so far an exciting but sobering process. Things which once seemed to me to be so all important are all important no longer. People who were wont too easily to arouse my

admiration arouse little in me, but tolerance and a pity they would never understand.

The little things mean so much. The big things mean so little.

One of my dearest friends, Colonel Tempest Stone, a man whom neither joy nor disaster could rob of his inward calm, often says to me, and has repeated to me through my many vicissitudes, happinesses and trials . . . "Get at peace with yourself. Nothing else matters."

I have not yet won that peace within myself . . . not yet. Maybe the years may bring it to me, or deny it to me, as they think fit. But of a surety I have found that Peace is to be found at moments in the unexpected places . . . from the unexpected things—from the rare people.

What lies ahead of me?

Who am I to solve the riddle of a Universe who cannot even solve the riddle of myself?